12 OUTSTANDING STORIES

ARGOSY

SEPTEMBER, 1957

Price in SOUTH AFRICA, AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND
TWO SHILLINGS and THREEPENCE

THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

VICTOR CANNING

ELIZABETH BOWEN

RHYS DAVIES

MICHAEL GILBERT

STUART CLOETE

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If you yodel at the local Fräuleins without
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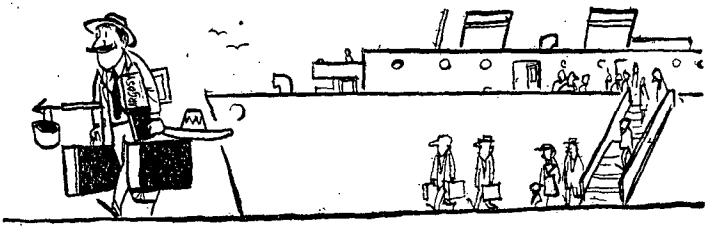

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ARGOSY

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Log Book

WE sometimes wonder why fiction magazines don't boost forthcoming stories with extracts from the text, following the example of film-trailers, which are the most compulsive things we know; one glimpse of the heroine screaming on the top of a cliff has us queueing in the two-and-ninepennies quicker than inches of adulation in the Sunday press.

Why not try out the notion in Argosy, we thought. Instead of telling them that next month is going to be an all-time high for suspense and romance, *show* them. Accordingly we set to work.

Here are three dramatic moments from *Taxes in Texas*, Walt Spitzberger's tense new drama of passion unleashed in the dust-blown streets of a little prairie town:

Take One—"Honey, the Sheriff ain't agoin' to wait no longer," said old Hi, his voice dazed with terror. "He wants the money real bad."

Lou put down the bundle of clean washing she had just brought in. Her face was set. "In that case there's just one thing to be done." She began to rummage in the bundle for her red silken stockings, but looked up suddenly, white-lipped. "Paw! Paw, there's—there's blood on the laundry!"

Take Two—"Coward! Coward!" Lou spat at him furiously. "You'll stand

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by and let the washer-women be shot at in the open street?"

Lank, limp, and long-legged, Hank lounged against the door-post. "Looks like it, honey," he said . . .

Take Three—Hank staggered through the doorway and pitched full-length on the dirt floor. "Here's your sheets, honey," he muttered before he passed out. Lou's eyes dilated with horror. A dark stain spread slowly across the twill . . .

At first, reading these extracts, we felt they would send readers hot-footing to the newsagent to place an order, but looking at them more dispassionately we feared we had given away too much of the plot. Here is our second attempt—

From next month's instalment of *In the Dead of Night:*

"Is this your property?" he said, displaying a small jet stud set in filagree gold.

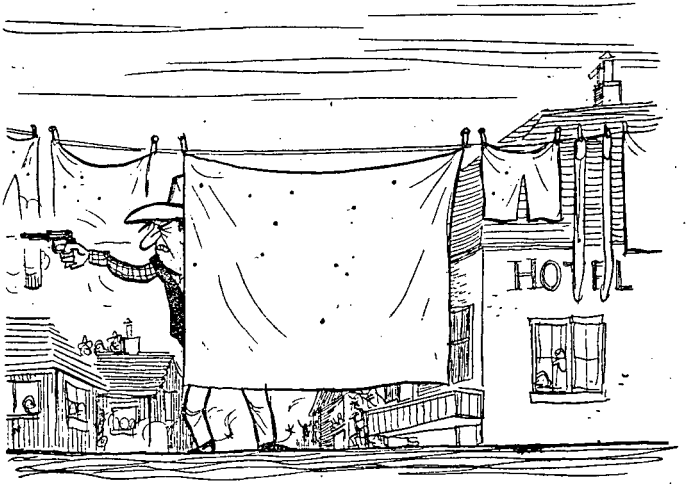
Lionel's fingers went up instinctively to his shirt front.

"Yes, that is my property. Where did you find it?"

"I found it just now, sir, clutched in the hand of Mr. Percy Osmond, who lies murdered in the next room."

Before readers dart off to their newsagents we must warn them that the last extract is from Argosy for March, 1874; but, of course, next month's Argosy contains plenty of moments to equal those . . .

Elizabeth Bowen is acknowledged to be one of today's most distinguished novelists. She holds the C.B.E. for services to literature, was awarded a thousand-pound fellowship last year by



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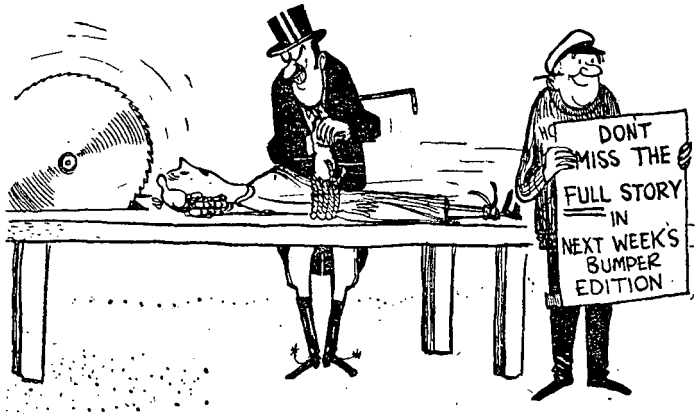
America's Bryn Mawr College, to enable her to devote her time to writing. Subtle, witty, perceptive, she views the characters in her books with an unsparing eye, is at her most characteristic in our new story. Had she not been a writer she would have liked to become an architect, and will go any distance to see an interesting building; houses are among the most sympathetic characters in her books. Of these, *The Heat of the Day*, *The Demon Lover*, are perhaps the best known, and, non-fiction, *The Shelbourne*, and *Bowen's Court*, a history of her Irish home.

Victor Canning likes to watch television lying flat on the floor with his head on a cushion. Favourite viewing? Slapstick. He plainly watches quite a bit of tennis and cricket too, to judge by his new story, which is concerned with some very unsporting characters, who nevertheless know a lot about these games.

Leslie Bonnet says he is the possessor of the Chinese Cloud and Banner Decoration with Special Rosette; this sounds less improbable when one learns that while in the R.A.F. he was sent to China to help reorganize the Chinese Air Force. He lives in Wales, where he breeds ducks, gardens, and corrects his five children. Big, benign, he carries with him an air of prosperity and well-being which, he says gloomily, deceives almost everyone.

This month we have a notable new story from **Rhys Davies**, a brilliantly obstreperous Welsh comedy in which the bright lights of Cardiff lead a man to his undoing; sex also rears its ugly head in *The Stuff of Dreams*, by **Helen Dore Boylston**, later to be included in James and Pamela Mason's new book of cat stories.

JOHN SILVER



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DISAPPEARING TRICK

Women get more of a kick out of winning than any man

BY VICTOR CANNING

I SUPPOSE for a young man I was doing fairly well. I had my own flat, and I was just managing to live within my income. Walter Philip Richmond, that's my name, and the income came from being a clerk in a London turf accountant's office. It was a high-class business, most of it done by mail or telephone. And since the boss was keen on the game himself, I had all the time off that I wanted to play tennis.

Other fellows may go for drink or women, but with me it was tennis. For three years running I'd worked myself a little deeper into the Wimbledon fringe, and if I could have set up a camp-bed at Queen's Club and lived there I would have done. All I wanted was tennis and the time and money to go on playing.

More time, more money . . . that's the point. You've got to dedicate yourself and that's expensive. And it was at Brighton last May that I saw my chance.

I was going down there for the weekend, and when I told the boss he said, "We've got a client down there—Herbert Gild. He's made a packet out of us but for the last three months we've had nothing from him. See what the trouble is."

I looked him up in the ledgers and there it was—fifteen thousand pounds in the last year. That's betting! So, about half past six on the Saturday evening, I visited Mr. Herbert Gild.

It was a top flat in a great block on the sea front, not far from the pier. I went up in the lift and pushed a brass knob set in the centre of a green-and-ivory-coloured door.

A woman opened it. She was tall and dark, good-looking, and with a little sort of heaviness to her underlip that made her smile seem sleepy. The smile came on the moment she saw me. I knew what that meant. I'd spent a lot of time in the last five years trying to convince women that I was only interested in tennis. Just the sight of that kind of smile now made me nervous and inclined to be rude—if necessary.

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I said, " Mr. Herbert Gild? " I handed her my card.

She looked at it and then stood aside for me to enter. She had a good figure, slim, and she moved well. When I got inside I saw that she was wearing a low-cut, clinging dress that left a man with no guesswork to do at all. She took me down the little hall and into a large sitting-room. It had a great sweep of window that looked right out over the sea. You felt you were on the bridge of a ship.

She nodded to a chair and gave a little impatient movement of her hand when I hesitated to sit down before her. I sat and she stood. She looked at the card and then at me. I got more attention than the card. I knew I would. The card didn't have fair hair with a slight wave in it, or blue eyes and the kind of body that can take you through three hard sets and leave you still able to run a mile. Personally, I would have traded all that for an extra inch in height to put more devil in my service . . .

She said, " Turf accountants? Does that mean you want money? "

I shook my head. " No. Your husband used to be a good client of ours, but we've had nothing from him in the last three months. This is a sort of routine follow-up. We just wondered if he was dissatisfied. You know the kind of thing."

If she did, she didn't bother with it. She flipped the card with a lazy finger and said, " What's the W.P. for? "

I said, " Walter Philip." And then, " Perhaps I could see your husband, if he's in? "

She didn't answer that. She walked to a cocktail cabinet at the far wall . . . one of those elaborate affairs that always let you down by not producing organ music when the doors are opened. Over her shoulder she said, " Would you care for some sherry? Or perhaps whisky or gin? "

" Sherry," I said. It was no good getting rude yet, or trying to put her off. When they're like that, they're like that. Besides, since my boss was good to me, I wanted to be good to him and get Mr. Herbert Gild back if I could.

She did all the usual things: handed me the sherry and managed to touch my hand; offered me a cigarette and brought her face close to mine, with the lighter flame between us so that it emphasized the greenish tints in her eyes. Some men, I suppose, like it.

She sat down opposite me and crossed her legs. I put her at about thirty and wondered what kind of man Mr. Gild was. In a way she answered that with her next question.

" I didn't know," she said, " that my husband was a betting man. Did he win much money as a rule? "

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I closed up at that. A lot of men keep their betting from their wives and if you want to stay in business you don't go round making trouble. I said, " Nothing much, really. We'd be out of business if the thing didn't go up and down." I gave her a smile to soften the obvious fact that I wasn't going to discuss her husband's winnings.

Quite abruptly she said, " Well, he won't do any more business with you. Six months ago he went out fishing in a small row-boat and he was drowned."

I stood up at that and said, " I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

She stood up, too, and she said, " Yes, it was very sad." She sounded as though she were referring to a cat that had been run over. And then, with hardly a pause, she said, " You're sure you're not just being discreet when you say he didn't win much? "

I said, " I'm sure, Mrs. Gild."

" Laura's the name . . . Walter." She put her hand on my arm and, with a smile, added, " Don't look so stiff. Sit down and have some more sherry and tell me all about the bookmaking business."

I didn't. But by the time I got out she knew where I was staying, and I'd seen a photograph of her husband, head and shoulders, sitting on the top of a grand piano by the door. He was a good sixty, white-haired, a bluff, lined face . . . a kind of Newfoundland-dog face, with the same sadness in the eyes.

But the thing that really set me thinking was her last remark at the door. " What a pity he wasn't more lucky with the horses. Except for his insurance he left me really badly off. Pretty soon I'll have to leave this flat unless . . ." She didn't finish the sentence and she didn't have to.

I went down the lift feeling as though I'd just finished a hard singles match. The way women can be. Single-minded, dedicated to themselves. And I had to grin at that. After all, that was me with tennis.

She wanted what—cash? a wealthy protector? And I wanted the centre court at Wimbledon—and the best pro in England had told me I could still make it, given time. Time, time, time—and money to buy the time.

There was a pub just round the corner and I went in and had a pint of beer. I stood with an elbow on the bar and thought it over. Mr. Herbert Gild had been drowned in a fishing accident. On his widow's own statement he had left her little more than his insurance money. And yet I knew he'd cleared up at least fifteen thousand pounds in the last year, and a little over five thousand in the previous year. That was a lot of money not to leave when he was drowned.

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He could have lost it, of course, betting with other concerns; or he could have spent it somehow . . . but, remembering that Newfoundland face, I couldn't believe it. I began to be very interested in Mr. Herbert Gild.

I left the pub and went round to the local newspaper offices and got the files of their back issues. It was all there. He'd gone out fishing about four in the afternoon and when darkness came he had not returned. The boat with a great gash in the bows was found lower down the coast the next morning. The body was never found.

That intrigued me. The body was never found.

I went back to my hotel and had dinner, and all the while I kept thinking about Mr. Herbert Gild and Mrs. Laura Gild. They didn't go together. An oldish man, sixty, and a nice fellow if the photograph was anything to go by—with a wife like that.

An old man's darling, or an old man's thorn in the side. She was just the kind who could get her hands on a well-heeled, elderly type and make his life hell. Oh, I thought about it a lot. But my thoughts were pretty well muddled up, just then. I didn't know what I was after. I didn't know what it was that I wanted to put my finger on.

But I did the next morning. I woke early and lay in bed with a cigarette. It's a good time for me. Before a tournament it is always my best time. You lie there and you see your opponent, and you play the match with him, and if you make a mistake in stroke play, you can go back and begin again.

And suddenly I had Mr. Herbert Gild all sized up. This is how I saw it. Old man married to a much younger woman. Happy at first, adores her, spoils her. She takes and takes and finally he knows what she is, hates her guts, wants to be rid of her. But he's a decent old man and doesn't want to leave her on the rocks, and he wants some comfort for himself. Why not? You need it when you're that age. He has two good years betting and tucks the stuff away without letting her know.

Then—with a good life insurance running—he goes out fishing. The end of Mr. Herbert Gild. Mrs. Laura Gild, believing him dead, collects the insurance. And somewhere, under some alias, Mr. Herbert Gild settles down to a quiet life.

If I could find him, I told myself, he would be happy to buy me off. For five thousand pounds, once I'd found him, I'd be willing to forget him. With that I could have three years of nothing but tennis . . . Europe, America, practice, practice, and I'd be there. Oh yes—he'd pay, to keep clear of his wife, and to keep clear of the insurance company.

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But first I had to find him. That was different. I chewed it over for some time before I even saw where to begin. I took a long walk along the front and tried to get the thing into some shape in my mind. It was a blowy, sunlit day when a man has to keep one hand on his hat and a woman one hand on her skirts, and the sea had a regular, stiff-crested run of waves like an old-fashioned painting. I enjoyed that walk because I was young and full of hope and I knew it was my great chance.

I decided that if a man wanted to start a new life, the hardest thing of all would be to shake off his old life entirely. And somehow he wouldn't be able to do this: some habit, some trick of mind—something was going to link him with it. Now, to spot this thing it was necessary for me to know all about Mr. Herbert Gild. I had to know him inside out, his strength, his weakness, his brand of whisky, his choice of cigars . . . everything I could. Somewhere among all these things I'd pick up a trail that would bring me to him.

And the best way to learn about Herbert Gild I decided, was through Laura Gild. Not even that made me think for one moment of changing my mind. In fact it gave the whole thing a relish. It was time someone made use of her for a change.

If she hadn't come to me, I'd have gone to her. But she made it easy for me. I went into the hotel bar for a drink before lunch and there she was; sitting on a stool in a smart spring suit drinking a martini. She saw me and smiled and I went over to her. This was work, court craft, so I didn't have to push myself. I went into it feeling beautifully flexed and ready to play a power game.

She said, " Surprised? "

I said, " No. You knew I was alone. You knew I wanted company. Finish that one and we'll have a bottle of wine with lunch."

She took it easily, but I knew I would have to be careful with her. " You've changed," she said. " Something's happened? "

" Nothing. But when I cross a door on business, I like to keep it that way. But if someone asks me in for the sake of my blue eyes it changes everything." I couldn't believe it was me speaking, but it was, like water off a duck's back.

She laughed and said, " I'll ask you in again—for more than your blue eyes." She had a throaty laugh. It did something for her lips and shook in her long throat in a way that made me suddenly relaxed and sure of myself because I felt that I could handle her. I was more dedicated than she was.

I can't say she wasn't good company. She was. She had a sense of humour, laughed a lot and, curiously, now that we'd

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made contact, she didn't rush things. But all the time I had the feeling of some well-oiled calculating machine quietly working away inside her.

I'd come down to Brighton by car and I took her for a drive in the afternoon. We stopped under some beeches up on the downs and we talked for a while, and when I kissed her I could feel a quick shudder in her body which, just for a moment, stopped the calculating machine. But it was only for a moment. Neither of us was in a hurry. Coming back—she had a dinner date that evening—she asked me if, working for a bookie, I got good tips for winners. I told her I did and promised to give her something now and then. I could see it was an additional way of holding her until I had the information I wanted.

That's how it began, and that's how we played it for about five weekends. And we made progress, both of us getting what we wanted. I spent every weekend at Brighton and I came very close to liking her, but I never trusted her. I placed a few bets for her and she was as happy as a schoolgirl when she won. Women, you know, get more of a kick out of winning on the horses than any man does. On the whole, of course, the week-ends cost me money and lost me tennis-playing time, but I told myself it was an investment. At least I made one economy—in hotel bills.

And what did I come out with at the end so far as Mr. Herbert Gild was concerned? I had it all listed in a little notebook. He was born in Wiltshire, only son of a country parson. Never did a hand's turn in his life; lived on a small fortune left by his father which—thanks to Laura—was gone by the time of his death.

I knew all his interests; his favourite authors, plays; his passion for gardening—she made him give that up in favour of the flat; the amount of his life insurance—a three-thousand-pound death policy with the National Company; and the fact that he had seldom left Brighton in the last ten years of his life, except for an occasional trip abroad with her. No close friends, no clubs, no old university buddies . . . just a nice elderly man living in a vacuum with Laura.

I knew, too, that the fatal fishing-trip was only the second he had ever made in all the ten years she had been married to him. Significant? But so far nothing that would lead me anywhere. However, I was convinced that if I kept on I would find some clue. The thing had become a passion with me. I couldn't really think about anything else.

At the beginning of the sixth week Laura rang me up from

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Brighton and said she was coming up to London the next day. She'd had a good win that day on a tip I gave her and she wanted to celebrate. Well, we did—and that evening I got my first lead.

We had dinner at a West-End restaurant and over coffee and brandy she made me a present of a pair of gold cuff-links. She was always giving me things, but right after the cuff-links she gave me the thing I really wanted.

She asked if I was coming down to Brighton that weekend and I said, "Not until the Sunday. It's the second Test match at Lord's and I'm going to spend Saturday there."

"Don't tell me you're a cricket as well as a tennis fan?"

"Indeed, I am. My old man put me down for the M.C.C. when I was a year old. I'll see you on Sunday."

She made a face and said, "You're as bad as Herbert was. He was a member, too, and cricket was the only thing that would get him up to London. It seems a stupid game to me. I don't understand it."

I didn't try to explain. Either you know about cricket or you don't.

But the next day I was full of it. Cricket. Lord's. The second Test match against the Australians. But Lord's was the thing. Most men interested in cricket would give their right arm to be members. And if you are a member with entry to the sacred pavilion, then death is the only thing that would force you to give up the privilege.

And I didn't think Herbert Gild was dead. Another name, another life, perhaps. But still a member at Lord's. All he had to do was to continue his subscription in his old name from his new address. As an infrequent visitor from Brighton few people would know him. At a Test match the pavilion is full of unknown old buffers and anonymous seedy country parsons who come up once a year.

The Test match began on the Thursday and went through to the next Tuesday. I got the boss to give me a few days from my annual holiday and I was there on Thursday morning. Gild was a member, all right. Still on the list. But none of the staff knew him when I inquired. So I kept my eyes open. I had his photograph clearly in my mind—so clearly that it was nearly my undoing. On the Friday, during the lunch interval, I saw him. He was standing at the long bar with a glass of beer and a sandwich; alone and with a placid smile on his face, the kind of look most people get after a good morning's cricket. But he'd changed.

He'd dyed his hair black and he'd grown a bushy moustache. He looked now like an amiable walrus, basking. I might have

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missed him but something about the large, sad eyes made me look again and underneath the walrus I saw the Newfoundland-dog face come to life.

From then on it was easy. I stuck to him. After the game he took a bus to Hampstead. I was on the bus. I was behind him when he walked through to a small house in one of the turnings off Haverstock Hill, near the Heath. It was a nice little house, expensive, not the kind of place that would let off rooms. I guessed he had it to himself.

On the Saturday morning I called the local rating office, pretending I was a valuer for a firm of estate agents, and I checked the assessment value of the house and the name of the owner-occupier. He called himself Henry Fielding—that made me smile, for Fielding was one of his favourite authors—and he'd owned the place for a year. And that made me smile, too. Obviously he'd got this place fixed up before he arranged his accident. I decided to be very careful.

I didn't go to Brighton on Sunday. I rang up and said I'd caught a filthy cold watching cricket. She didn't like that, but there was nothing she could do. I spent the day thinking. And I got the approach worked out. When I'd found him I'd been excited. But now I was calm, really cold and calm, and I knew exactly what to do. He had plenty of money and I wanted some of it.

I checked that on Monday morning. I rang one or two friends in the same business as myself, and finally one of them said that he had a Henry Fielding, same address, on his books—we hand out information to one another, you know. Have to as a kind of protection.

Well, Henry Fielding was still doing well on the horses. "Too well, old boy," my friend said. "Glad there aren't many like him about."

After that I called at the offices of the National Company and said I was interested in taking out a policy. When I left I had the business card of the employee I had been talking to. I drove straight up to Hampstead, parked in Haverstock Hill, and with my briefcase tucked under my arm walked to his house.

An elderly housekeeper type of woman came to the door and I told her I'd like to see Mr. Henry Fielding and that I was from the rating office. That got me in without trouble.

He was sitting at a small desk in a study that overlooked a neat square of green lawn at the back of the house . . . books, good furnishings, a television, and a couple of paintings of race-horses. The papers were open on his desk at the racing pages

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and he was in slippers and a comfortable velvet jacket. He gave me a smile and nodded to a chair by the desk.

I sat down, and with a serious face I said, "I'm afraid I misled you, Mr. Fielding. I'm not from the rating office. This, I think, will explain."

I reached out and put my National Company card in front of him. He stared at it for a long time. Then he dropped slowly back in his chair and I could see his lips flexing thoughtfully. But he didn't give himself away.

"Well? What do you want?" he asked. He had a nice deep voice, cultured.

"You know what I'm here about . . . Mr. Gild."

There was no start, no surprise. He just looked at me and then he nodded. He was a man who knew how to take a blow. I felt sorry for him, but it made no difference.

"How did you find out?" he asked.

"It's my job," I said. "Investigator. If a case looks a bit odd we pay up—but we don't give up. Particularly when the body is never found. It's taken me some time."

He said, "Does my wife know about this?"

I said, "No. Nobody knows except you and me. We're encouraged to work on our own. We only report to the office when we have results."

"And how did you find me?"

I told him about Lord's, but I didn't mention his wife. I finished, "You made a good job of it—except for that. I'm sorry to put you in this position."

He smiled at that. "It was silly of me, wasn't it? But you know how it is with cricket. Apart from that, everything went according to plan. I swam ashore with everything all ready. All my money transferred to another bank under my present name . . . Even that boat with the bows smashed. That happened after I left it. Something must have hit it in the dark."

He sighed. "And now this. Well, I don't regret it. She gave me hell and she would never have let me go. It seemed a good idea." He stood up and went to a cupboard and brought out a sherry decanter.

He handed me a glass and then, rubbing his broad chin, said quietly, "I suppose I couldn't just repay your Company the three thousand pounds? You know, privately . . . so that they would forget all about it? I don't want her to know I'm still alive. If she knew, she'd be after me for the money I've still got—"

I stood up. "My Company wouldn't dream of it, Mr. Fielding. You know that. Fraud is the one thing that makes

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them see red. They'll go the limit on it. As a man you have my sympathy and understanding. But a Company—it's just a machine, no heart, no pity."

He lifted his glass to me and sipped, and we were silent for a time. Then he said gently—and I was glad it had come first from him—" You've got a heart, though. And only you know about it. You're young. Five thousand would mean a lot to you."

Well, there's no point in beating about the bush. I played horrified, then hard to get, and then finally I agreed. And then he did something that surprised me. He went to a wall safe hidden behind one of the pictures and he brought out five thousand pounds in fivers and tens, and counted them out to me.

" I'm a betting man," he said. " We like to keep cash about us. And also, because of my past, I like to have a fair bit handy in case . . . well, in case I have to move quickly." Then he straightened up and looked at me and there was no sadness in his moist eyes now, no dog-walrus charm; just a hard, granite face. He said, " But don't come back for more. Go away and forget. If you come back, you'll make me desperate and I'll ruin you even if it finishes me. You've got more years to lose than I."

" You won't see me again," I said. And I meant it.

I walked out with five thousand bulging in my briefcase, and made my way up to Haverstock Hill where I'd left my car.

Sitting in it was Laura.

She was frank, hard and frank, and there wasn't a thing I could do just then. I got in and she drove. And we didn't go back to my flat. She took the Brighton road. And she did most of the talking.

" You're a fool, Walter," she said, " if you think I didn't know you were up to something. That doesn't mean I don't love you. I do. And you love me though you don't want to admit it yet. But one thing you've got to learn is to be honest with me. That way you'll get what you want. I don't want him. I just want his money—for us. You can have all the tennis you want, but I'll be with you. If you try to break away, I'll knock the world from under your feet. How much did you get from him? "

" Two thousand."

She laughed. " How much? Be honest."

" Five thousand."

" That's better. And he's got more."

" He'll be desperate if we try for more."

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"Of course. I know him. He's capable of anything, for all that sad-dog look. But he won't know where we are until we want more, and then we'll handle it so that he can't bite. We'll go back to the flat now, pack up, and leave. Together."

We stopped somewhere for lunch and she told me, laughing at my surprise, how she'd put a private detective on to me in the last two weeks. She knew I'd gone up to Hampstead from Lord's, didn't believe my cold story, had been waiting outside my flat that morning, and had followed my car in a taxi.

I had to admire her and just then I wasn't too worried about being with her for a long time. Since I'd taken up this business we'd become close in an odd way. I suppose what I mean is that we were one as bad as the other and that, together with all the rest, really held us.

But deep down I knew that somewhere we'd part, one way or another. At all events, the main thing was that I now had time and money for tennis—and she was all for that. She'd travel with me, work for me . . . Things didn't seem too bad. With luck, I thought, we'd make the five thousand do, and maybe I could persuade her never to bother him again . . .

We got back to Brighton just after three and went up to the flat. I carried the briefcase. Inside the doorway she put her arms round me and kissed me and the familiar hungry shudder was in her and I met it. Things would be all right, I told myself. I really did like her. And I'd have my tennis. Already I was turning over my programme. I'd wasted enough time already.

We went into the sitting-room together, my arm round her, laughing. She was like quicksilver, alive, and full of that thing that runs into you like fire from a woman in love, and I knew it would be some time before we started packing.

But the big surprise was to come. He was there. Standing by the big picture window, with the sea and the sky behind him. Somehow he looked twice as big, and no friendliness in him.

Just for a moment in the silence that followed our surprise I found myself working it out. How he'd got into a car and driven down quickly, passing us while we'd had lunch and—irony—letting himself in with the latchkey he'd always kept.

He took a step forward and, frowning at her, said roughly, "You bitch!" Nothing cultured, just plain hate; and then, looking at me, he said in his normal voice, "If you'd been an ordinary insurance clerk with luck in his hands, I'd have left you alone. If it had been just you, I'd have paid the price and relied on your good faith. But when you come to me wearing a pair of my gold cuff-links that only she could have given you . . . then I don't feel any good faith is involved." And now, also, he

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was hating me for being close to Laura because while he hated —and feared—her, he still loved her.

Laura, and her voice was cold, no shake in it, said, " There's nothing you can do about it. If you don't like it—call the police." And she laughed. It wasn't the kind of laugh any man likes to hear . . . .cold contempt, no pity.

The laugh set him off. His hand came out of his pocket, and he said evenly, " There is something I can do. Take my five thousand back and leave neither of you in a position to talk." He was holding a small automatic.

I knew what was coming; first Laura would get it and then me, and he would be away. I jumped for him. I went forward in a long dive and he fired. There wasn't much noise to it.

He hit me high up on the shoulder, but I hardly noticed it as I crashed into him and brought him to the ground. I didn't have to do any more. As we rolled apart Laura ran up behind him. He started to rise to his feet and she hit him over the head with a heavy glass ashtray from a table. He flopped over with a groan.

Getting up, I said, " He's not dead, is he? "

She laughed. " No. He's alive."

From then on things went fast and she was in charge. I was losing blood from my arm and kept turning faint. She bandaged it for me and said she knew a doctor who would fix it and not ask questions. Herbert Gild was still lying on the carpet, breathing heavily, and I knew it would be some time before he came round. When he did we would be gone.

Laura whipped round and packed a suitcase and then she helped me down to the car. She drove and headed along the coast towards Eastbourne. Somewhere on the way I must have passed out. When I came round, it was dark and I was sitting alone in the car with my right shoulder throbbing.

No Laura. No briefcase with five thousand.

And that's the way it has stayed. I'll never see her again, I know. Or Mr. Herbert Gild. And I'm sure he'll take good care she never finds him again.

I'm the one with the real load of trouble. The bullet smashed my right shoulder joint and although it's healed nicely, it'll always be stiff. Can't raise my arm above my head and tennis is out of my life for good.

★ ★ ★

He is every other inch a gentleman.

REBECCA WEST

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GOLDEN WOMAN

It's queer how beauty can be so deadly

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

THE first we saw of her was her sports car, red like a danger sign and coming down the twisting mountain road as fast as a stone falling. Steel glitter of metal and paint dazzle, and then, when she was closer, the golden head under the white linen cap.

We watched, pretty open-mouthed, because we don't see a lot of cars like that in Kilmory. But when she came to a stop outside Mike Raftery's store it wasn't the car we looked at, it was her. I couldn't imagine any man in the wide world looking at anything else when she was by him. The rich gold hair, somehow dark for all its brightness; a kind of twisting depth of darkness in it that would be warm to touch, to bury your hands in to the wrist. And the white peaked cap like a uniform, the sort an air pilot might wear now; and white gauntlet gloves, slim and somehow wicked on her hands. And a white silk shirt, sleek as her own skin and shimmering in the sun.

She lounged back against the green leather and flicked a cigarette into her mouth like a conjuring trick, while we stared at her as if she had come from Mars. Nobody spoke, but a woman standing in the doorway of her cottage took a look at the figure of her under the silk shirt and slammed her door on the sight. But a second later she was peeping out through the curtain, one eye hidden by her geranium plant.

"Any of you boys speak English?" the girl in the car said. Brown skin she had. Almost golden, like her hair. There was a panther once in a travelling circus that came to Kilmory, yellow-gold and dangerous. That was the colour of her skin. And the same eyes she had, green and slanting. The same smooth power in the way she moved, with a sudden, swift anger when she was crossed. But she wasn't letting herself be angry now, although I could see the shadows of it flickering behind her eyes.

"Come on, fellows," she said. "Won't somebody help me? I want to find my way to White House. I'm Mrs. Schumacher, your new neighbour."

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It wasn't much of an accent. I've heard fellows back from the States after a few years with more of an accent than she had, and although we don't call the house she wanted the White House, but by its old name, O'Brien's Lodge, I knew what she meant and what she wanted. She must be the daughter of the old American man that was hunting butterflies up the mountain and had taken the Lodge for the summer.

" Sure," I said, " we'd be glad to help you if we can, ma'am. You'll be wanting the house where the old gentleman is after moving in, maybe? "

She looked at me kind of helplessly, and Phelim Ryan beside me gave me a poke in the ribs with his elbow. " For pity's sake, Tim," he said, " can you not answer the lady straight out? "

He went forward to the car, out of the circle of us, and with the first step he took it was as if the rest of us vanished out of her sight, turned into stones. Even her face changed. Her eyes grew bigger and darker, and a small kind of smile came to her mouth that she didn't know was there. Not the smile she'd given when she wanted to be friendly to us, and had said she was our new neighbour, but a real smile, out of the soul and heart of her, the way the panther had seemed to smile when it was going to be fed. And Phelim rolled his shoulders as he walked forward to her and I knew that he was smiling, too.

There wasn't a girl from Kilmory to Kilbrack who hadn't seen that smile. And a good few of them had been sorry after. A lazy, warm kind of a smile.

" You go back a small step up the road, ma'am, and turn up past Heffernan's farm . . ."

She laughed at that, and swung open the little, low door of the car. " I reckon the only way I'll reach my husband this side of tomorrow is if one of you brings me to him. If you can fit yourself into this midget racer you can come along and show me the road."

Phelim looked round at us, grinning, and tilted his cap to one side of his black curls. Then he turned back to her and began to fit himself down into the little green seat by her side. There was a roar from the silver pipe at the back, and a squirt of dust under the tyres. I jumped sideways, and the pair of them shot past me up the street, swung round in a narrow circle where the road broadened outside Cohen's Bar, and streaked back again towards the mountain road. Before the dust had settled they were small as a toy on the road beyond.

The old woman came out from behind her geranium and squinted into the sunlight after them. " Puttin' himself forward like that," she said. " He'll come to harm one day as sure as

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Purgatory." A couple more of the old ones folded their shawls over their chests and agreed with her.

But the men only shuffled their feet in the dust and grinned, thinking of the American woman and her golden hair, and the lucky one that Phelim was to be riding along with her in her grand racing car. And I was thinking of the poor fool I was not to be there instead of him. If I'd stepped forward that time instead of hanging back . . . It's queer the small things that stand between a man and death sometimes, and he cursing them.

The next day I was up at the Lodge all the same, to do a job for the old American. He wanted someone that knew the mountains and had a donkey to come butterfly-hunting with him. So I slung the turf baskets across the ass and was up at the Lodge by nine o'clock. Early as I was, Phelim was there before me. There were stables behind the house and he was leading two horses round from the yard to the gravel sweep in front of the main door: a slim chestnut mare of old Heffernan's, with little wicked ears, and a big powerful black horse that Phelim had bought over in Kilbrack a month before and was waiting to resell.

Before I had a chance to talk to him, Mrs. Schumacher came out of the house with her husband and, standing beside him in her riding-gear in the sunlight, she looked even more like his daughter than his wife. He was maybe not so old in years—about forty-five or fifty—but his shoulders were narrow and stooped, and he had small, washed-out kind of eyes hidden behind big, glittering spectacles. He looked up at Phelim and the horses as if he wasn't sure which was which, and patted his wife on the arm.

"Mind you don't break your neck, honey," he said, and then came pottering over to me to load his kit into the baskets: two cameras, a haversack, a big bottle with a wide cork and some stuff in the bottom that looked like white moss. A servant girl came out of the house, carrying a flask and a picnic basket.

"Are we all set to go?" he said, and I nodded, and gave the ass a whack to start her, but out of the corner of my eye I was watching Phelim. He was helping Mrs. Schumacher onto the mare, although she didn't need any help, and she was steadying herself with one hand on his shoulder, and he standing there beside her as proud as a statue.

For the first time ever I realized what a fine figure of a man Phelim was, if you didn't bother about character or the look in a man's eyes. Black hair, dark and shining as wet coal, and blue eyes, pale as the sea in summer. And the size of his shoulders, and the height of him. He swung his leg over the big stallion's back and lifted his head as if the house and the broad green lawn

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and the golden woman were his and not the American's. I felt sorry for the little old man and hoped that he hadn't seen.

It's queer the passion old men get for marrying young wives. I knew an old fellow beyond Kilbrack that courted the same girl thirty years, waiting for his father to die so he could bring his bride into the farm. And when his da did die at eighty-four, what did the man do but jilt his girl that was near fifty the same as himself, and marry a little bit of an usherette out of a cinema in Tralee, wearing trousers and lipstick. He thought she was as good as a film star until he had had a taste of her, and then it was too late. Maybe old Mr. Schumacher was the same, and now he just had to close his eyes when he saw a man the right age standing beside his wife.

I got annoyed at the very thought of it, and went off up the path towards the mountains as fast as I could belt the ass in front of me. That wasn't very fast, but enough to drive the old man into the ground inside five minutes, or so I reckoned, with his hopping, and his scuttering, and his fluttering from one rock to another, like one of his own blasted butterflies. Him with a wife young enough to be his daughter.

But I was wrong. Ten minutes we were walking. Twenty minutes. Until I felt the sweat rolling on me like dripping melting in the pan, and the ass near beat, but still he was there behind me, spry as a Cabbage-white, his spectacles glittering and his breath hardly stirring his skinny chest. He gave me one of his sideways looks and a kind of small sly grin.

"Tryin' me out, eh, boy?" he said.

He didn't say any more, and I didn't try him out any more. We just climbed easy, the ass picking her way up to the bog, and us following. The sun was on our shoulders and the sea spread into sight beyond the shoulder of the mountain, green-blue, and silver where the sun caught the small slants of the waves, and here and there, halfway to the horizon, a scattering of islands, dark green with trees. The sight of it lay on us like a great pain on our hearts, and I had to say something about it or burst.

"They do be gettin' grand lobsters out beyond, this season," I said. "Big fellows that'd take your finger off at a nip of their claws."

"Lobsters, eh?" said Mr. Schumacher, squinting at the bay. "We must go fishing for 'em one day soon, but right now we've some business." And he began ferreting round in the rocks, scratching here and scratching there with a little thing like a flattened-out teaspoon. Now and then he'd be putting a bit of moss into the jar or into a small envelope that he'd tuck into one of his pockets. I saw a grand-looking Red Admiral flittering past.

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" Mr. Schumacher, sir," I said, " will I catch that butterfly for you now, and you maybe not able to run after it like you used to? " Because I felt kind of sorry for him, I don't know why.

" Butterfly? " he said. " Why in the name of heaven would you want to do that? " And then he laughed. " So that's what they think I am? A butterfly hunter? Well, damn my aunt Mary. No, boy, I'm not a butterfly hunter—I'm doing a thesis on Atlantic sea-board lichens," and he gazed up at me as if that was quite different from butterfly hunting. I didn't see much difference myself.

The ass was wandering, so I tied a hobble round her forelegs and lay down in the sun. But that didn't suit the old man. " Hey, boy," he said, " come and look at this one." And he showed me a bit of withered moss growing on a rock. " Now," he said, " you find me some more of that, and call me when you do."

It seemed to me a queer old way to spend a morning but, would you believe it, after a while I got interested. I'd find him some of this stuff, or something else he was after, and he'd clap me on the shoulder like I'd found him a pound note, and put a long name to it like a priest's blessing. And working alongside of him there in the sunlight on the mountains I got to feeling a kind of liking for him.

The way he'd touch the bits of moss now, or a small flower he'd find, his fingers gentle like a woman's and yet strong. He must have been made of steel and whalebone, that little old man. I was fit to fall on my face from scuttering and picking and scraping at the rocks, but there he was, not a feather out of him, hour after hour. If he hadn't called a stop for lunch I think I'd have collapsed. I'd rather swing a loy all day on the bog than be bending like that again.

" Have a sandwich," he said. And, natural as if we were two men working on the same cut of turf, he had me sitting down beside him, sharing the chicken sandwiches the servant girl had put up for him, and drinking tea out of little silvery cups that burnt your fingers. We looked out across the bay, and I found myself wondering where Mrs. Schumacher was, and Phelim.

Once during the morning I'd thought I'd seen a flash of green silk far away down the mountainside, and she'd been wearing a green shirt that morning. But I could see no horse near her, so it couldn't have been her. Or it shouldn't have been.

" How long did your honour think of staying in these parts? " I asked him. " Herself now, wouldn't she be finding this a dull kind of place to stay long, after the grand city she must be after living in? New York, would it be? "

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"Yes," he said. "We live in New York." He said it flatly, as if he didn't much care for the thought.

He looked at me sideways. "I think she'll like it here fine," he said. "She has a born talent for getting on with people." There was a kind of queer little shine deep down in his eyes when he spoke about her, and I thought of the farmer and his usherette from Tralee. He'd had that same kind of shine at first, but it hadn't lasted, and I wondered how long the old man had been married.

He answered me as if he had heard my thoughts. "We'll be five years married in a couple of weeks' time," he said.

Five years, and that shine still there. Maybe she'd never met a man like Phelim before, although, as I remembered that smile of hers when she saw Phelim first, it was hard to believe. She wasn't born to be married to an old, dried-up man, and I wondered why she'd married him at all. Although it wasn't anything to wonder at really, when I pieced together what I heard in the following days from Phelim and old Mr. Schumacher himself.

He was rich, and always studying and too busy to be after women. And she was working in a little bit of a shop where they sold cigars. The queer thing was that he didn't smoke cigars or anything else. It was the cigar boxes he wanted, for his bits of moss.

"You ought to get married, Tim," the old man said to me, one sandwich-time a few days after that first morning. "The man that isn't married is missing half of life." And he polished his spectacles the way he did whenever he was moved by something.

It was sad to see the poor fool he was about that woman. And every day she and Phelim would be riding. If she hadn't been American and so rich, there'd have been words from the pulpit about that; as it was, the parish priest paid a call on Phelim, but it didn't do any good. You might as well have tried to drive a wasp from a honey-pot. He had so much honey that he began to look sleek and sleepy on it.

She bought him a pair of riding-breeches and a black coat over in Tralee, and a pair of fine brown boots. Seeing the pair of them ride down the road together, and not thinking of the morality of it, your heart would lift. The handsomeness of them; her hair rich as golden fire under her white cap, and her back straight and easy, swaying in the saddle as if she was born there, and not behind a counter somewhere in New York. And Phelim like a great prince, arrogant as a hawk, turning sideways to her and laughing.

You'd think life was a wicked joke sometimes, that it'd put two

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people together like that, the one fitting the other as your foot fits a shoe, and then tell them, " Thou shalt not."

Not that they listened. It was like a fire kindled. Smouldering and smoke at first. He greedy, and she bored or flirting as she'd flirt maybe with any handsome man that winked at her back in New York. But as they spent their days together, the fire took, and what had started as mere wickedness turned into love—God forgive me for putting such a word to immorality.

You could see it flame between them. She grew taller when he came to her, there on the gravel sweep in the mornings, his black curls shining as he swept his cap to her. Her face would glow with the warm blood rising, and Phelim would smile at her across the mare's withers, while old Mr. Schumacher snuffled and pottered about, getting his bits of things into the baskets across the ass. And when I'd see the three of them together, the sin seemed to be in him and not in them. But when I'd be with him up the mountainside, I'd get the warmth of liking for him back again, and I'd wish that he'd finish his miserable little bit of a book and be off with him back to America, him and his golden wife.

She could play the whore there to her heart's ease and him never the wiser, I didn't doubt. But she couldn't do it much longer in Kilmory without him knowing, and I didn't want to see his eyes the day he knew, and see the shine die in them.

He wasn't a man that could ever show what he felt about someone he loved. He couldn't call her his heart's darling, as Phelim could, and smile with white teeth like the moonlight breaking. He was like the lichens that he showed me—grey and clinging to the rocks. And yet when you'd look through the big burning glass that he had you'd see great beauty in them; strange shapes and patterns and delicacy of colour like the light changing on the sea.

But if a boot sole bruised them there'd be nothing left but a smeared ruin of dust. And I could see Phelim's boot sole very close to the old man's heart.

We got to that state of friendship when we wouldn't need to speak, neither he nor I being great ones for talking. We'd work side by side, and I near as quick as he by then at finding the lichens that he wanted. Then when noon would come we'd sit down on a flat place and spread the morning's finds on a sheet of newspaper, and he'd make notes in his sharp little handwriting in a big book, or sometimes he'd compare the lichens with drawings and pictures that he had. And we'd eat our sandwiches and drink our tea out of the little silver cups and sit quiet, watching the islands and the sea.

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" Do you know the story of the Islands of the Blessed? " he said to me one time. " The islands where every one will be young and tall and handsome—and happy? Do you know that story, Tim? Those islands out there look like that to me." He sighed, and pulled at the grass with his fingers.

" I think I must take Mrs. Schumacher out to them one day soon. It must be very lonely for her, me leaving her every day. Not that she complains, mind you," he said, glancing at me sideways. " I wouldn't have you think that of her. A heart like her golden hair," he said, and then he took off his spectacles and wiped them.

It was the nearest I ever heard him come to saying what he felt about her.

" A grand idea," I said. " Your work would be near ended now, I suppose? A small trip like that would make a fine end to it."

" Yes," he said, " my work is nearly ended here." He plucked a small aconite from the grass beside him and held it in his fingers.

" It's queer," he said, " how beautiful things can be so deadly. A little juice from this pretty flower and you'd be paralysed. A little more, and you'd be dead." He smiled rather sadly and rubbed the petals between his fingertips until they stained the skin an ugly yellowish brown. " It's like an image of our lives," he said. " You see something beautiful and grasp it and all that's left is a dirty stain. And whose fault is it? The flower's, or the hand's? "

That night I went to see Phelim to try to tell him what he was doing.

He had a cottage down the far end of the village and I found him shaving, although it was only Tuesday. He had the paraffin lamp set up on the chest of drawers and a towel round his neck, and a big bottle of green stuff that he sprinkled all over his hair and face when he was finishing. It smelt beautiful and must have cost a power of money.

There was a new suit on the bed, too, that I'd never seen before, and a red silk necktie.

" You're looking grand, Phelim," I said.

" And feeling grand, Tim og," he said. He sprinkled some more of the green stuff on his neck and rubbed it in with the palm of his hand. " Never better."

" Are you going somewhere tonight? " I asked.

" Only over to Tralee to the cinema," he said, grinning at me. And that minute the sound of her sports car came roaring down the street.

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We both heard it in the same instant and cocked our heads; but he did it like a man that expected what he heard. It went on through the village and droned away beyond, and then it seemed to me that it stopped.

" Don't," I said, seeing there was no time to waste talking round it. " I'm sure as sin the old man knows what's going on."

" Does he now? " said Phelim, his face going thoughtful. " Does he now? "

For a long minute he stayed looking at me, but it wasn't me he was seeing, and I wondered what it was.

His mouth was hard and ugly as an iron bar, and I thought that maybe I didn't know Phelim Ryan at all. He tossed the cap of the green bottle in the air, and caught it as it fell; a quick snatch of the fist that was like a man taking and breaking something. And I heard the little black cap crunch inside his fist as he closed it.

" Would you be taking the old fool up the mountains again tomorrow? " he said.

I told him I would.

" And where is it exactly that you take him? "

" We'll be up near the Giant's Cliff tomorrow," I said. " Why do you want to know? "

" Never you mind," he said. " The man that minds his own business lives longest, they say."

He began putting on his grand new suit and knotting the tie round his neck.

" Ah Tim og," he said, " you don't know what living is at all. None of us do in this goddamned dead end of beyond. New York, now—there's a place. The people in the streets till morning. Cinemas and bars and theatres and shops like palaces. And women like you see on the pictures walking in the streets. Ah Tim, that'd be living for you! "

He fiddled the tie under his chin to his satisfaction and tucked a new yellow handkerchief in the breast pocket of his coat, and all the time he was giving me small cunning looks as if he was bursting to tell me something. " What would you say to me going off to New York one of these days, Tim? Wouldn't that be the grand smack in the eye for the old craw-thumpers round here, now? Wouldn't it? "

" Ay, like enough, Phelim," I said. " But a long journey like that now you'd better be doing alone . . ."

He laughed in my face, and clapped my shoulder. " Get out of that," he said. " You're only an old woman yourself." He went out of the door, leaving me to snuff the lamp, and listen to his boots crunching the road, sure and confident.

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Well, I'd done what I could. I closed his door for him and went home.

It was raining the next day. A thin mist of rain drifting in from the south-west like sorrow. The islands lay like shadows in a hidden sea, and the ass climbed the path with her ears drooping and the raindrops glistening like silver on her raggedy grey coat. The rain seeped under my collar and made my shirt stick to my skin, but if the old man could work in it, I could. We tramped up the narrow path one after the other, our boots slipping on the wet heather roots and the mud.

Ahead of us the Giant's Cliff rose like a great wall of rock out of the mountainside.

A couple of days before, we'd noticed some queer-looking patches of lichen scattered up and down the face of it, and since it had been near dark then I'd suggested coming back another day and spending a morning there. I hadn't reckoned on it being a day like this. A scurry of rain caught us, cold as February, and I thought for a moment that the old man was thinking of turning back. But he only peered up at the sky and turned up his coat collar.

" We'll work close in to the cliff, Tim," he said, " where it's a bit sheltered."

I unloaded the ass and for about half an hour we stayed close in to the rock face, the rain settling lightly and clinging on our stooped shoulders.

But at last the old man put a hand to the small of his back and stood up slowly, his joints creaking.

" Blast this rain," he said. " I'm not as young as I thought I was, Tim feller. I suppose we ought to be getting down."

I stood up to stretch, too, bending my head back to ease the crick in my shoulders, and in that instant I saw the rock falling, huge and dark against the grey sky.

I yelled, and leapt for the old man to push him clear. In the last instant of seeing anything I saw him, as clear as a photograph, staggering backwards down the slope, his arms flung sideways to keep his balance, his mouth open with astonishment; the grey veil of the rain behind him and the ass with her head hanging, and one ear drooping to the ground. And then the pain hit me, as if my body had been cut in half.

I came to slowly, lying in a strange bed in a strange, bright room, with sunlight flickering golden shadows on the ceiling and a girl standing in the doorway carrying a tray. The Schumachers' servant girl. And I began to remember, and to realize what had happened.

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In all the times I'd been up and down the Giant's Cliff as a boy, I'd never known so much as a pebble fall from it. It was solid as a sea-wall.

And I remembered Phelim's hand closing over the little black cap and crushing it until it splintered—as he had meant the old man's skull to splinter under the rock.

"Where am I?" I asked, "and how long is it since . . . since . . .?"

"In Mr. Schumacher's very own room," she said, between wonder and disapproval. "Seven days lying here, babbling like a maniac, and him hardly leaving you day or night, as if you were his own child." She put the tray down on my knees.

"Is he here now?" I said.

"He is not. Would you have him getting sick, too, without a breath of fresh air for a week on end?" She went over to the window and flicked the curtains farther apart. It was broad afternoon, and through the wide, low window I could see the bay, and the islands resting on the quiet water like dark green birds asleep.

"Well, they have a grand day for it, God be praised," she said, "after all that rain."

"A grand day for what?"

"For their picnic on the island. Phelim took herself and Mr. Schumacher out in Larry Nugent's boat this morning. He's been suggesting it this while back, but Mr. Schumacher wouldn't go until he knew that you were out of danger."

"The three of them?" I said stupidly. "Alone together?" And as she stared at me I tried to lift myself out of the bed. "I have to go after them—I have to tell him—" Even in my own ears my voice sounded very weak and far away. The tray slid to the floor in a crash of crockery, and I felt the room going round me, and the darkness coming, like the shadow of a great rock hurling down from the sky.

It was night when I came round again, and there was a small light burning by my bed. For a long time I lay and watched two hands moving slowly and carefully in the warm yellow glow of it, wiping a pair of rimless spectacles with a great snow-white handkerchief.

Wiping them over and over again until I thought the hands would polish them away.

"Is it yourself, your honour?" I whispered.

"It is, Tim," he said, "it is. But I'm afraid I've bad news for you of your friend. And of my poor, poor wife. Tragic news. They were both drowned this afternoon." And he went on

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polishing his spectacles, his fingers brown as a gipsy's against the white silk.

Brown they were as the day he had crushed the aconite flower between his fingertips and told me how a little of its juice would paralyse a man. Paralyse him so that he couldn't swim, and the boat upsetting in the quiet, still water.

For a moment, in the pale circle of light I saw Phelim's dark head sinking, and his golden, stolen woman drowning in the depth beside him.

And in spite of everything I felt a terrible sorrow on me, and turned my head away so that I shouldn't see those old, stained hands against the snow-white silk.

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NURSERY CURSERY

Time all of a sudden tightens the tether,
And the outspread years are drawn together.
How confusing the beams from memory's lamp are;
One day a bachelor, the next a grampa.
What is the secret of the trick?
How did I get old so quick?

Perhaps I can find by consulting the files
How step after step can add up to miles.
I was sauntering along, my business minding,
When suddenly struck by affection blinding,
Which led to my being a parent nervous
Before they invented the diaper service.
I found myself in a novel pose,
Counting infant fingers and toes.
I tried to be as wise as Diogenes
In the rearing of my two little progenies,
But just as I hit upon wisdom's essence
They changed from infants to adolescents.
I stood my ground, being fairly sure
That one of these days they must mature.

So when I was properly humbled and harried,
They did mature, and immediately married.
Now I'm counting, the cycle being complete,
The toes on my children's children's feet.
Here lies my past, good-bye I have kissed it;
Thank you, kids, I wouldn't have missed it.

OGDEN NASH, *Preface to the Past*

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THE SILKEN SCREEN

Mountains abound in magic

BY LESLIE BONNET

A PEASANT boy was carrying two geese from his home in Shuan Ko to the small market in Lungchi. Each goose was enclosed in a basket of lightly woven bamboo, and the baskets hung from each end of the carrying pole, so that as the boy tripped lightly along they bobbed solemnly, the one in front of him and the other behind his back.

The narrow path that the boy followed lay close beside the blue Min river which ran, dashing itself into white foam, over the rocks in the white sunshine of a summer day. Tall mountains, crowding to the water's edge, lifted white, icy pinnacles into the far sky.

Yen—for that was his personal name—a sturdy figure in trousers and tunic of faded blue cotton, went gaily where the path led, sometimes down by the river's bank where the thunder of water made the air shake, sometimes high above it over some mountain shoulder where the air was keen and clear and the roar of waters diminished to a whisper.

Soon the path descended to a little plain where the great snow mountains retreated for perhaps as far as an arrow might fly.

Here, by an old bridge of stone over a small mountain torrent, Yen was astonished to see a young man of superior appearance lying, reclined on one elbow, beside the path.

As the goose boy approached he marvelled at the stranger's rich robe of flowing silk. It glowed in the bright sunshine in green and blue and yellow.

On his head was a hat of bright blue with a great brim curled back to display a gay cockade of red and gold.

Yen had never before seen so splendid a person, and could not understand how so great a one could be alone, unattended by servants, in a region so lacking in the refinements of good living.

He would have hurried by in respectful confusion; but the young man spoke to him. " Goose boy," he said in distinguished accents, " I am satisfied that you have a kind heart. I am very

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weary. Would you permit me to ride for a while in one of your goose baskets?"

Yen grinned bashfully. He knew the young gentleman must be making sport of him, because, without doubt, there was no room for even a small child in either basket. But an expression of sincere wishing remained on the young man's face, so Yen, knowing not what to do for the best, expressed his willingness to carry the high-born personage, and waited to see what would happen next.

He did not have to wait longer than a tiger's pounce. Before he could draw breath the young man had leapt lightly into the basket that lay on the ground behind Yen. Yen could not imagine how he could have crammed himself into its small space.

With a bewildered shake of his head, Yen tugged at his carrying pole, and to his amazement both baskets rose lightly from the ground, nor did he have to shift his pole forward to balance the different weights. The basket behind him seemed no heavier than the basket in front.

A little frightened by now, remembering that mountains abound in magic, Yen hastened along with his burden, not caring to utter a word.

He pressed onward, the pole bobbing gravely to his quick steps, through the hard heat of midday, and on until he was passing through the green shade of a grove of bamboo. There in the middle was a pleasant glade, where the fierce sunlight could only pierce in bright shafts through the delicate fronds of bamboo. And there a voice brought him to a halt.

"Do you not think," said the superior young man from behind him, "that this would be a suitable spot to stop for a little refreshment?"

Yen obeyed the question; but with a bad grace. He had neither food nor time to waste in this fashion. And it did not seem that the young man was any better provided.

However, no sooner had Yen dropped his baskets to the ground than out jumped his passenger from the hinder basket. Yen stared at the basket in dull bewilderment. There it was, a deftly-fashioned cage, with its bamboo bars far enough apart to admit light and air. There was the goose sitting reflectively inside and quite filling it.

Yen shook his head. And then opened his eyes wide.

The young man of high position had just clapped his hands to his mouth; and now he took out of it, among other fine things, a table of black wood, curiously carved.

On it Yen could see dishes of rare meats and other delicacies, winecups of silver, and rice wine ready heated in an ancient silver pot.

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The young man pointed politely to the feast with his chopsticks, and the two, seated on ornate stools, ate and drank with great satisfaction.

When the meal was part consumed the young man struck his forehead with his forefinger as if he had until now forgotten something. "I recollect," he exclaimed, "I have my fiancée with me. Since we are in so lonely a place, and because we are on terms of such friendliness, do you not think that we might dispense with ceremony and invite her to join us?"

What could Yen do but agree?

Straightway the host clapped his hand to his mouth again; and this time brought out a young person of extreme beauty. Tiny at first, she grew with such speed that by the time her feet had reached the ground she was of just the size that one would expect a young person of extreme beauty to be.

With a modest bow of her jewelled head she sat down upon a third stool and ate and drank in a shy and modest manner.

When this happy meal was finished the young man announced that sleep was overcoming him and, taking off his splendid hat, he lay down on his back on the soft grass and soon added the buzz of his sleeping breath to the drone of insects in the afternoon heat.

The young lady looked inquiringly at Yen. She put her head on one side and arched her delicate eyebrows.

"Although I am betrothed to this young lord," she said, and her voice sounded like silver bells, "the match is not at all to the liking of either of us. I have a young man with me of most honourable attainments. If you will pardon his intrusion, I would wish to sport with him in this pleasant place."

Seeing that Yen only stared, the young lady put her hand to her lips, as if to stifle a yawn, and placed on the ground a youth of obviously high breeding. Politely ignoring Yen, this couple then drew a little apart, and talked together with much gentle laughter and many loving smiles.

After a while the host, still lying on the grass, grunted and stirred, and showed signs of awakening.

The beautiful girl glanced round from where she enjoyed the conversation of her companion, and put her hand again to her curved lips. She took out from between them a bright screen of red silk embroidered in gold with Phoenix and Dragon, emblems of Yin and Yang, of woman and of man; and placed this between them and the waking young man.

For a moment she looked over the top of it at Yen. "To avoid embarrassment," she said.

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The host, waking, saw that he was alone with Yen. When he had looked around and had seen no other person, he got slowly to his feet.

He said to Yen, "Although I am betrothed to the graceful young lady who was here but a while ago, the arrangement is by no means to the liking of either of us. And, if the truth be told, I have with me one young lady of whom I am much more fond. Would it inconvenience you if she were to join us?"

Yen was in no mood to object; so the young man clapped his hand to his mouth, and there in no time at all was another young lady of exquisite beauty. She bowed to Yen with dainty grace as if he were a person of some account. And then this young couple drank together and clapped hands and jested and laughed.

Presently there was a sound of stirring behind the screen. "How vexing," said the young host. "Those two tire too soon."

With that he popped his young lady in his mouth with no more ceremony than if she had been a sunflower seed. Then, stretching himself upon the ground again, he appeared to sleep.

At this, his fiancée appeared from behind the screen. She smiled gaily at Yen. It appeared that she had already swallowed the youth who had been with her, for there was no sign of him. Even as Yen smiled humbly back the lady put the screen into her mouth. It was a rich and elegant sight to see the bravely coloured embroidery disappearing with such speed and smoothness.

The young host now awoke again.

"I must apologize for having slept so long," he told Yen. Then, picking up his fiancée in a considerate manner, he swallowed her in a trice. Next he swallowed the table, and the dishes, and the winecups, and the chairs, and the empty wine pot.

Indeed he swallowed everything, except a large tray of bronze which he handed to Yen with every appearance of esteem. "It is a regret to me that I have nothing more worthy than this poor tray to present to you," he said.

And disappeared.

Had it not been for the tray, which Yen bore away with him, he would have found it difficult to believe that such remarkable things had really happened.

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STAGECRAFT

Sir Henry Irving's handwriting was almost illegible. He once gave an employee notice of dismissal, but only the signature was readable, so the man was able to use it as a free pass to the Lyceum for many years.

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ANGEL

She had become a child with a secret

BY J. S. H. SPAIN

THE sign stirred, weakly at first, in the light of the truck's headlamps, winking uncertainly with all but two or three of its glass studs which were broken. ROADHOUSE—CANNON CITY DRIVE-IN. With an arrow for a full stop. In the cab of the truck, three people read its message as it grew brighter, flared, and went out, in passing, leaving them blinking in the contrasting gloom of the cab. The sun had died a whole hour before: a summer sun.

Mame talked incessantly. Tennessee drove. He might have listened to her, but he didn't have to; didn't need to. Not yet. He looked, not at his wife, nor at the road immediately ahead, but beyond the tapering white strip to infinity. As the truck roared westwards in the growing darkness, he crouched a little over the wheel.

Black-haired, thin-faced, with a greasy forehead highlighted in places, the underside of each jowl was dull dark shadow. The business of driving narrowed his eyes and kept his lips tightly closed in a thin line, giving him a purposeful look.

Mame wanted to know where they were going. He'd said, "Come on, let's go for a ride," and hadn't spoken since, and didn't mean to.

The way she talked, she caught her breath like a singer. There had been a time when Tennessee had teased her about it. He used to say she only came to life when other people were tired, meaning himself. She wasn't to know that in those days.

Now she had a job—to make up for the dollars he didn't earn. She called him Ten, not because it was short for Tennessee, but because he was always borrowing money.

"Come on, Mame," he'd say. "Lemme have ten—till I get that job with the new company—" He never did get the job. More often than not, all he got was a dollar—which was all she could afford—and she would lie awake at night and sigh. But after a while she had begun to put two and two together, and it had amounted to a good deal more than four.

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Watching him now, from across the cab, she broke the silence again.

"Ain't just anybody that can marry a truck-driver from Tennessee," she sneered, jerking her head and miming perfectly his old boastfulness. He went on driving. She looked away, at the road, at the cracked side window. In a half-surprised voice she said, "I guess that makes me a somebody."

"Guess everybody's gotta be *somebody*," said Five. Sitting between them on the long bench seat, she spoke for the first time since they had left the old shack where they lived, a damp, draughty wooden erection with a muddy track outside.

She was nearly seven, but she was called Five, Mame told her friends, because she was a half of Ten . . . "He gets ten dollars, but she only asks for five—she don't know the value o' money, either." Mame's shrill laugh was infectious. There was no trace of bitterness in it at first, but now she said it when he was there, just to watch the look in his eyes.

She had come to like it when he got angry, if only because it seemed to be some small compensation for the things she had missed in life. Mame grew old; her dreams wore thin, and she blamed Ten. She knew him. He was wiser; he knew she knew, and he wasn't the man to forget it.

Ten might never have heard them; he went on driving, looking to infinity with the same purposeful look—a look which hadn't left his face all day. Even when he had spoken to Five, for one deceitful moment, back in the shack before leaving, he had been intense.

"Don't you go tellin' her where we're goin'," he had said. Five had become a child with a secret. He was tempted to make her promise, but didn't want to overdo it. The seed was sown.

As they rolled out from under the storm-clouds into the clear night, he mechanically checked the instruments on the dash-board, which are as much a part of a truck-driver's life as the smell of burnt oil that seeps through the floorplates and saddens the air in his cab.

"Great idea, to come out, sudden," said Mame. "Sure is better'n sittin' about back home. How far're we goin'?" The engine noise abated as Ten changed into the overdrive without turning his head. Five sat listening and watching, her hands between her knees.

"What's the matter with him?" Mame asked, looking at Five. "Can't even open his big mouth."

"Maybe he's tired," said Five defensively.

Mame laughed. "Why, he never did a day's work in his life." She sighed. "What's the use? You're too young. You don't

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know the half of it." She propped herself up against the door post, and hitched up the shoulder-strap of her slip, coloured coffee and pink, curdling under a thin white blouse.

Five brooded, convinced that her mother was lying. It seemed so unfair; so cruelly unjust, and hateful—only a child knows how hateful it can be.

"I hate you," said Five, with all the candid venom she knew. Emotion seethed in her small clear brain, seeming to boil over and run down her face, fighting with tears for possession. Mame laughed, self-consciously patting her hair into place with one hand.

"Now ain't that nice," she leered, twisting a corner of her mouth. "Little brat!" She spoke viciously, more to Ten than the girl.

"See what you fathered," she sneered. Then, quickly, "I know, *I* know . . . like her mother. Don't say it." It was more in self-defence than hate: self-defence, and the ever-increasing twist of the knife. Ten made no move. Mame was doing all the work.

"You dumb or somethin'?" The air hissed through the engine air-cleaner. Tyres whined. Five edged away from her.

"Well, come on, say somethin'." Mame, who talked so easily, found the silence strained and unwelcome.

"Say somethin'," she commanded Five, almost shouting.

Five trembled. "I'm scared," she said.

Mame stared, surprised and hurt. Then she burst into shrill laughter that clawed all round the walls of the cab.

"Say, kid," she said, "you're a genius. You got feelin'." More tenderly, she asked, "What you scared about?"

"I don't know," she said, and she looked down at her bare feet. She considered for a moment, in her childlike way, the whole field of human relations.

She said plaintively, "It ain't *always* his fault."

Mame laughed, a little too loudly. "D'ye hear that, you?" she said to Ten. "I guess she's all yours now."

A whole crowd of noises jammed and jostled to be the loudest. Ten's right foot depressed the accelerator pedal, and the engine note pitched itself a little higher. The only other movement was the slow weaving of his arms, correcting the steering. Mame eyed him curiously. "There's somethin' goin' on. I can tell," she said slowly. "Where're we goin'?"

She looked at Five, who, although her eyes shone, just shook her head. "Don't know, eh?"

Five avoided her eye, and Mame gave up. "Aw, forget it."

The truck was picking up speed, and inside the cab the sounds

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were piercing and shrill, and increasing in volume. Outside, the grass verge slewed by in a green blur.

" Hey, what's the hurry? " Mame edged forward in her seat. No reply. She looked at Five. " Come on, kid, tell me where we're goin'? "

Five hesitated, and Mame appealed with her eyes.

" I—I can't tell you," she said. " I promised. But," and she could contain herself no longer, " where we're goin', there's *everythin'*, like—like candy, an'—an' ice-cream, an' it's not goin' to be like that awful ol' shack."

Her eyes sparkled and she shuffled in her seat with excitement. Then, as if remembering, she said guiltily, " But I haven't to tell you about it. I promised." She turned to Ten. " Didn't I promise? " she said.

Mame looked at Ten, softly, tenderly. " Gee," she said, " I didn't know you wanted to surprise me. An' all the time, I thought . . . Ah well, never mind." She sighed, and leaned back. " Gee," she said.

The truck screamed along and Mame vaguely watched the flying shapes of trees as they flicked by the window. All at once she became aware of the high speed of the truck, and frowned. " Say, if you don't take it easy, we ain't goin' to get there at all," she said.

As if in answer, Ten put his foot down hard and the accelerator touched the floorplates. The truck surged forward with a howl so high-pitched that it was nearly inaudible. It blanketed their ears and deadened their awareness.

" I don't get it." Mame tried to sound casual as the engine and tyres reached up with their offering of peak power and screaming, whirling insanity. But there was more than a trace of fear in her voice, and Five found it hard not to answer. She bounced up and down with excitement, quickly turning her head, looking first at Ten and then at Mame.

" I promised not to, but I guess it's all right." She glanced at Ten. " Isn't it? " She spoke loudly, above the noise.

For the first time, Ten turned his head to look at Mame. His eyes burnt with hatred. He answered Five with a single word. " Yeah."

Five bounced up and down, beating her knees with her fists.

" We're goin'," she said, leaning over to speak confidentially into Mame's ear, " to Heaven." And she clasped her hands, tightly, expectantly.

Far above the noise of the truck and the whine of its tyres, Mame screamed. Wide-eyed and almost speechless with terror,

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she understood everything in that one second: the mystery, the purpose of the journey so late at night and so strangely suggested.

She fought to open the door of the cab against the slipstream, struggling crazily until, with a heave, she fell away into the darkness.

Five screamed. Caught by the wind, the door slammed. Not quite secure, it banged and rattled. A few spots of rain, steaming on the engine covers, witnessed the opening of the door.

Ten braked, bringing the truck to a leisurely halt. He was calm, and had gathered Five close to him. He felt her little body shaking as she sobbed into his side. The groan of the seat springs and the sharp intake of her breath were the only sounds, with, in between, a creaking and snapping of hot metal contracting in the cold night air.

"You stay right here," he drawled in his thin reedy voice that had been saved for this. He jumped down into the road and ran back along the verge, slithering down the steep bank at what he judged was the right place. No other light but that from the moon disturbed the darkness, and when he saw her, he turned away quickly.

Her neck was broken.

Five was crying bitterly when he climbed back into the cab. "Gee, it's cold," he muttered, hunching his shoulders. Looking at her for a moment, he spoke sharply.

"Pull yourself together, kid." His voice cracked. She raised her face slowly to look at him with wet red eyes. He cursed when she threw herself down on the seat again, sobbing.

He started the engine. Looking down at Five, he said, "Guess she didn't like my idea—about Heaven, huh?" Grimly, and half to himself, he muttered, "I just knew she wouldn't . . ."

He waited, in case she looked up, then he let in the clutch and drove away, quickly through the gears, glancing into the driving-mirror away to his left, and seeing only darkness in a frame.

Five was sitting up and taking notice again by the time they came to the hill. Another sign glided by: ROADHOUSE CANNON CITY KEEP RIGHT. With an arrow.

The red glow surrounded the roadhouse like a corona. It came from a huge neon sign hung over the front, lighting the island of grass and the gravel drive all round it and colouring them a hellish red. The truck pulled in, crunching and chewing the gravel into little ridges before it leaned forward, halting as if exhausted, and under the light it had grown a shadow, still and deep. Ten jumped from the cab and swung Five down beside him, holding her by the waist. He did it easily, despite the lean appearance of his body.

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"This is it, kid," he said in his thin voice. "What'd I tell you?"

Five had stopped crying and only an occasional sob shook her small frame so that she caught her breath involuntarily. As she looked up, her pale face with its crystal teardrops reflected the red glow from the sign. High above the gaudy front, it stood out against the night sky, overwhelming the stars. In curling glass, it spelt out a single, simple word: HEAVEN.

In deliberate simplicity, it ranked with the single word spoken earlier, by Ten, in the truck. To Five, it was even simpler than that: Five saw a truth that was not naked, and did not know that in living, a truth can be a lie, too. She knew only the innocence that children know, until they grow older—older like Ten.

A juke-box jangled somewhere inside the roadhouse; in the great new world. The lights in the soda-fountain held out to Five a promise of all the things she had ever dreamt about, and her tears dried steadily in the night air, and were forgotten.

Overawed, she breathed, "My! this is better'n back home."

Ten shrugged at first, with all the borrowed innocence of the child beside him, and then saw her smile contract as she remembered . . .

"Aw, never mind, kid," he sneered. Piously he patted her head. "Come on." He was beginning to feel cold. "Let's go see your Aunt Emmie." He added, suddenly thoughtful, "She ain't gonna like this at all."

"Who's Aunt Emmie?" asked Five.

"Aunt Emmie? Why, she—" he began to laugh, as the idea came to him—"why, she—she's an angel," and he laughed so much he had to steady himself with one hand on the truck.

"An angel?" asked Five, puzzled.

"You'll see in a minute, kid," he said, buttoning his coat, and pulling it down at the back. On the steps of the verandah, he smiled as he thought of Mame. It would be hard to prove. Sure it would . . .

He turned to look at Five, who stood beside the truck, gazing up at the sign. His smile faded into an uncertain curl of the lips.

"Say, kid," he said, "if—er—if anybody starts askin' questions, you don't know nothin', see? Don't you go tellin' them anythin'." He turned to the door.

All at once he stopped, with one hand outstretched, reaching for the handle. Slowly he lowered his arm and twisted his head to look at Five.

She was watching him. Once more, Five had become a child with a secret.

Ten bit his lip. "Hell," he muttered, and was afraid.

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The sign drew her eyes away, and she stared at it, engrossed and thoughtful. Ten turned sharply.

"Wait for me!" she cried when she saw the movement. But he had opened the door, and the clamour of the juke-box drowned her pathetic little voice—for the moment.

★ ★ ★

UNDER LOCK AND KEY

No need to get keyed up, these questions are merely for mental relaxation; decisions as to whether Harvard, Yale or Chubb'll give the minimum of trouble. Dial 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 and the combination's yours! If in doubt, answers are located on p. 109.

1. *Whose Lock was raped? Whodunit?*
2. *"Her father he has locked the door,*
   Her mother keeps the key."
   Never mind who she *was, but can you give the first line?*
3. *Who was the Knight of the Fetterlock?*
4. *"There's been an accident!" they said,*
   "Your servant's cut in half; he's dead!"
   "Indeed!" said Mr. Jones, "and please
   Send me the half that's got my keys."
   Author, please.
5. *What do you associate with: shift-lock (or shift-key); flintlock; Morlock; the person from Porlock?*
6. *Fable tells us that Lucy Locket lost her pocket. Who found it?*
7. *The House of Keys. Any suggestions as to what it is?*

SHEEP ON THE LINE

He [Father] could never resist leg-pulling, particularly by telephone. Once he was asked, by someone who got the wrong number: "Have the sheep come?"

"Yes," he rejoined.

"Let me speak to the manager," said the voice.

"He's off today, sick," said my father.

"Where's the foreman?"

"Drunk."

"Tch! Tch! Tch! Well, I'd better come down myself. Where are the sheep?"

"All over the shop . . ."

The poor fellow hastily hung up and dashed to find a tram. Then my father was sorry, but it was too late.

ROY CAMPBELL, *Light on a Dark Horse*

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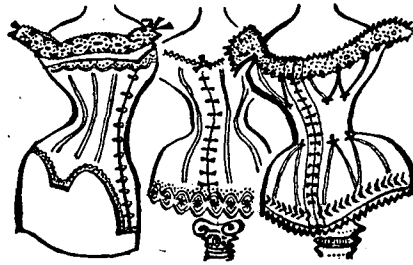

ALL TO

O fair undress, best dress!

The Castle of Indolence

The corsets and bustles occupied one counter; there were stitched corsets, long-waisted corsets, armour-like boned corsets, above all white silk corsets with coloured fan stitching on them, of which a special display had been arranged that day; there was an army of dummies without heads or legs, nothing but torsos lined up, their dolls' breasts flattened beneath the silk . . . On the other side there were camisoles, little bodices, tea-gowns, dressing-gowns, made of lawn, nainsook and lace, and long white garments, loose and diaphanous, which conjured up visions of long drawn-out lazy mornings succeeding nights of love . . . The display in the trousseau department was lavish and indiscreet—it was Woman . . . soon to become alive with the life of flesh and blood, sweet-smelling and warm with the fragrance of love . . .

EMILE ZOLA, *Ladies' Delight*,
translated by April FitzLyon

Tiger Stripes

A striped blouse in a clearing by Bazille
Is, you may say, a patroness of boughs
Too queenly kind toward nature to be kin.
But ceremony never did conceal,
Save to the silly eye, which all allows,
How much we are the woods we wander in . . .

Ho-hum, I am for wit and wakefulness,
And love this feigning lady by Bazille.
What's lightly hid is deepest understood,
And when with social smile and formal dress
She teaches leaves to curtsey and quadrille,
I think there are most tigers in the wood.

RICHARD WILBUR, *Ceremony*

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FRILLED KILL

Scrimshaw is the practice of carving bone and ivory, especially whales' teeth, into intricate patterns and objects. The museum has innumerable pretty specimens, from walking sticks with knobbly heads to dainty needle-cases and birdcages. A favourite product was the ornamented busk used to support the front of a 19th-century corset. One of these is inscribed with the lines:

Accept, dear girl, this busk from me;
Carved by my humble hand.
I took it from a Sparm Whale's Jaw,
One thousand miles from land!
In many a gale
Has been the Whale
In which this bone did rest.
His time is past
His bone at last
Must now support thy brest.

JAMES MORRIS, *Coast to Coast*

Fireman's Lift

Harriette was a perfect nightmare in the same room with you, taking as much pains in doing up her fine hair and folding her laced nightcap and gown as if she were preparing for a ballroom. I once remonstrated with her on the folly of spending two hours thus and then waking me out of my sleep to give my opinion of how her nightclothes became her, whether she looked more like Cleopatra waiting for Antony or Potiphar's wife when trying to seduce Joseph . . . . Her reply was: " Suppose there were to be a fire, I should so like to be admired as I descended the ladder."

Confessions of Julia Johnstone, 1825

When I look at young girls and think of all the crazy things they're going to have to wear before they get through, I wonder they have the courage to grow up.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

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Becoming Unseemly

I could see their eyes often straying to my nightgown laid out on a chair beside the fire. " I do not think such a nightgown is suitable for a girl," said Lady Katharine in a grave duty voice.

" Oh! but I am very strong," I said, " I never catch cold."

Mary Mackintosh held it up with a face of stern disapproval. Of course it has short sleeves ruffled with Valenciennes and is fine linen and cambric nicely embroidered. Mrs. Carruthers was always very particular about them. She said one never could know when places might catch on fire.

She examined the stuff, one could see the chair through it beyond.

" What *would* Alexander say if I were to wear such a thing! " The thought seemed to suffocate them both.

" Of course it would be too tight for you," I said humbly, " but otherwise it is a very good pattern and does not tear when one puts up one's arms."

". . . Such a garment is not at all seemly."

" But why not, dear Lady Katharine? " I said. " You don't know how becoming it is."

" Becoming! " almost screamed Mary Mackintosh. " But no nice woman wants things to look becoming in bed! "

ELINOR GLYN, *The Vicissitudes of Evangeline, 1905*

Swansong

Under moving branches
Leisurely she dresses,
And the leafy sunlight
Made you wonder were
All its woven shadows
But her golden tresses
Or a smock of sunlight
For her body bare . . .

Of the tales that daughters
Tell their poor old mothers,
Which by all accounts are
Often very odd;
Leda's was a story
Stranger than all others.
What was there to say but,
Glory be to God?

OLIVER ST. JOHN GOGARTY, *Leda and the Swan*

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A SPOT OF BOTHER

There was a storm brewing right enough

BY RHYS DAVIES

ORMOND, upset by his favourite team losing the League Match and, earlier in the day, a very raw shindy with his Mary Ann, so far forgot his principles as to go thoroughly astray in the city, that football Saturday.

Sometimes sheepish, more often bellicose, he was a young married coal-miner endeavouring to settle down, too soon, to life. Profligacy was not his natural bent, but exceptional circumstances can achieve an exceptional breakdown of discipline, and, besides, Ormond was not one to halt in the thought that eccentric conduct can bring perils pertinent to it.

As dusk fell, after the disastrous match, he uncharacteristically broke away from the bunch of faithful boys who had journeyed with him from Bylau, twenty railway miles away in the swart Welsh hills, and for a time he thrust his dejected jaw through back streets whilst a drizzle wetted his well-oiled mop of curls. Then, wandering into many bypath public houses, he drank far more than was normal with him. By ten o'clock he reached the docks district, reputed place of saturnalia, and there he picked up a harlot who seemed to his by then illumined eyes—perhaps because of the big amber beads she wore down her front—cheerful-looking as a string of Breton onions.

He met her in a crammed pub called The Fireman's Larder. After sundry conventional courtesies had been exchanged she asked him if he was married. "I am, see!" he replied. "To the best little Mary Ann that ever trod on a man's toe."

"I thought so; I can always tell the married ones." The woman took out cosmetics and mirror from her bag and dabbed thickly at her face as though in logical comment. "She's gone away for the weekend, I expect?"

"That's it!" Ormond said, enthusiastically recognizing perception but not mentioning that Mary Ann had torn off her thick-lensed glasses—always a bad sign—that morning and declared she was returning to her Aunt Maud's house "for ever:" she found his football excursions to the city objectionable and had

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not yet acclimatized herself to male isolations, though of course there were other seethings.

" She's gone by train! " he exclaimed, thumping the beer-soaked table. " A puff-puff, see! Stops at a dozen stations before she puts her lovely leg out and stares from her glasses to see who's meeting her. Short-sighted, see? "

" Sometimes they're well off short-sighted," the woman said, and swallowed at a gulp the single gin Ormond had bought her. He did not approve of women drinking, except a long-winded token one for sociability's sake.

She told him her name was Patricia, and in return he took out his wallet and extracted several snapshots. " There's me! " he pointed out, unnecessarily. There, indeed, he was: uniformed in the army; bare-kneed with the Bylau Football Club; standing in a meadow among whippets and daisies; proud before a pigeon cote in which meditated his racing-birds; and one of him and Mary Ann twinly smiling a wide-open smile outside a chapel.

Patricia made suitably attentive comments, and Ormond was encouraged to show, from among other documents in the wallet, the flattering character given to him by the C.O. of his regiment.

" Anyone would think," she tittered, before excusing herself for five minutes, " there isn't a wonky corner in you anywhere, sweetie."

At closing-time they sailed away from the wharves on a trolley bus brilliant as a ship lit up at night. When they got off they went up the portico steps of a tall gaunt house. Its peeling stucco was black-veined as a varicose leg. In the hallway a stately eighteenth-century staircase stretched, bereft not only of people but of carpet and the wash it had long needed. A naked electric bulb, spotted with fly dirt, hung forlorn in the strange locked-up silence.

To Ormond, accustomed to the poky but bustling interiors of Bylau cottages, the proportions of everything were majestic, and Patricia's flat on the second floor palatial. A begrimed plaster bust of Socrates on the mantelpiece, although an empty beer bottle stood beside it, added to the splendour. " Who is it? " he asked, gaping. " Your dad? "

" No, a Lord Mayor, I think." Patricia, wheezing as she stooped, pulled off her mud-spotted shoes, which had buckles of the finest diamonds.

" Up in Bylau," Ormond said respectfully, " we only have them in the cemetery, on high-class graves." Shortly afterwards he pulled her to him by her beads. She had switched on the wireless and a dance band started to croak.

" Oh, not yet! " Patricia said.

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She had small eyes lolling far down in green sockets, and he admired, in solemn illumination, all that his own bared eyes saw: it was the same admiration that came from him in the cinema when actresses fabulous as mermaids waggled to and fro before their proud men. She lit a cigarette and seemed momentarily abstracted.

The room was full of bulky furniture. A vast wardrobe of menacing black wood stood diagonally across a corner, near a door leading, presumably, to another room. The grand bedstead was of brass. Pink and blue articles of clothing hung over the top of a screen patched with floral wallpaper. Two windows were flimsily curtained. But the spacious room soon ceased to interest. As is the way in drink, inquisitiveness had narrowed to a single obsessiveness. From outside came the hum of a passing trolley bus, and this reminder of journeying preoccupied him for only a second or two.

"Staying the whole night?" she asked, suddenly eyeing him.

"If you please," Ormond said bashfully. "Owing to my last train being gone by now, even the one where you change at Pontypridd."

He was undressing when a flashing explosion of light jumped through the room. "What's that?" he called, above the wail of the dance band, trouser braces dangling in his arrested hand.

"The overhead bus wire does that sometimes," declared Patricia. She was standing close to him. "The flash comes through the curtains."

"I thought it was lightning," Ormond said, listening a moment as if for a growl of thunder.

"Perhaps it was lightning," Patricia said indifferently. She unscrewed the pearl earrings, large and rosy as moons, which were almost her last coverings. "I didn't hear a bus." She ruffled his hair, sniffing. "Nice hair, sweetie boy. Too much oil on it, though."

His strong arm dotingly about her waist, he said, "There's violets in it. Three and sixpence a bottle in Barney's Cash Chemists on the Square in Bylau." Another flash of strange light tumbled through the room and, although engrossed in her charms, he mumbled, portentous, "Storm brewing, right enough!" From the dance band came a jesting tune in welcome contrast to the previous dirge.

"No, that one *was* a trolley bus," Patricia said. "I heard it passing. The reel gets jammed on the wire." She jumped into bed quite briskly. "Leave the light on, darling. I don't like the dark . . . No, don't turn off the wireless. I like a bit of dance music. It goes on till midnight."

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He went into a deep cave of sleep early, lulled by the siren's croon then oozing unhurried out of Patricia's wireless.

A knock on the door can mean anything, even in Bylau, or as in those places of the still older world where men believed that a stranger at the door is sent by the ever-watchful gods. Mary Ann answered the knock, peering from her thick glasses at the tall, thin man standing politely enough, on the beautifully-whitened steps.

Following his inquiry, she bawled down the short passage to the kitchen, " Ormond! A fellow to see you." When Ormond appeared, shirtsleeves rolled up, she retreated to the kitchen with a sniff. The breeze of her transit proclaimed that, in her judgment, the caller had to do with whippet racing, gambling, or other anti-home pursuit of the various male clubs in Bylau and thereabouts.

" Can I see you in private? " asked the caller. He wore a long black overcoat of flappingly thin material. His long thin nose was of startling Caerphilly-cheese whiteness, and it twitched whenever a vowel came into his words. " Down the road, perhaps? " he invited, jerking his head towards the street of squat four-roomed dwellings, all alike and stuck together in well-kept solidity. A patch of waste ground, where children played, lay at the end.

" What for, down the road? " Ormond blew, sleepily astonished. He was not long home from the day shift, after a hot pit-head bath, and he had just eaten one of Mary Ann's meat broths, full of root vegetables, and a milky rice and egg pudding. " I've got a house of my own. Come in . . . No," he warned, in sudden afterthought, " I don't want any vacuum cleaners, electric washing-machines, or encyclopedias. The money in the pits won't allow them. No free samples, either."

Mary Ann closed the kitchen door with a concurring slam; she too disapproved of hire-purchase goods and cheeky salesmen besieging orderly homes.

" It's a personal matter." The caller's simple words came sliding out of the corner of his mouth. But his eyes gleamed with messages to be revealed only in street confidence: one moment they seemed probingly impudent, the next wooingly adulatory.

Ormond, yawning and scratching his curls, took him into the parlour. Languid tolerance lay in his flesh and muscles. Everybody had their living to earn.

Perhaps this thin, black-overcoated chap wanted him to take out a life insurance.

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The stuffy front parlour was seldom used. Its furnishings had belonged to Mary Ann's parents and included their bygone portraits in heavy golden frames. A mulberry plush cloth, thick as a carpet, covered a round table; on its centre lay a family Bible of ornate leather and gilt clasps which had never been opened. Two china stallions of ferocious demeanour reared matched on the mantelpiece. The honeyed late-afternoon light filtered in through foaming lace curtains kept clean as an angel's nightgown.

"Nor we don't want a television set," Ormond added absently. "Owing to me being out a lot and Mary Ann's weak eyes."

Standing by the round table, the caller showed sudden decision. A narrow hand of peculiarly swift pouncing whisked an envelope out of an inner pocket of the black overcoat. He drew three small limp cards from it and passed them across the table. Ormond gazed at each card in turn. Wonder slowly accumulated in his absorbed face.

"Well, well!" he remarked, returned to the first card for further scrutiny, and said, "Who's this? Not me, is it? Not with a pair of braces dangling from my hand!" He took the cards to the window, where the light was stronger.

The caller looked down his long white nose in deprecatory regret, though a smile of placating coyness went on and off his lips; he himself, saying, "Excuse me," had shut the parlour door, as if he feared draughts. "It's you, plain enough, chum," he now whispered. "The one of you in the bed is the best."

It was. Ormond peered at it so concentratedly that his eyes squinted. There, solidly full-faced, was his head asleep on a white pillow, and, beside it, another head recognizable to the meanest intelligence as a woman's, complete with hair. "Ay, it's the best," he grunted, from down his throat. He spent quite a time in further study of the prints.

"Works of art!" the caller said, no censoriousness in his tone.

Ormond returned to the table and spread the three cards on Mary Ann's prized family plush. He pointed with a thick, strong forefinger. "First class!" he agreed, congratulatingly. "I'll have half a dozen of those two, postcard size . . . and an enlargement of *that* one, big enough to frame."

The man, collecting the flaps of his long overcoat together with a wriggle of enjoyment, uttered a whinny of mirth. "That's good, chum!" he jerked out, his manner still man-to-man. "Negatives only for sale, though. Worth a lot, those negatives. Sale to be completed on Saturday, if you can't manage it now," he ended with accommodating comradeliness.

Ormond crossed to the door, opened it, and bawled into the passage, "Mary Ann! Come here!"

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She appeared with such rapidity that his call might have concealed some private bird-note understood by her ears alone. "This chap wants to sell some photos of me," Ormond announced, giving her an unnecessary push to the table. "There they are!" The man drew his overcoat about him, blinked, but remained still.

Mary Ann, squarely short-bodied, fiery-coloured, and altogether local-cast as her husband, but wearing a flowered voile frock, settled her glasses before taking up the cards for the important scrutiny due to any photographs of close relations or self. She, too, carried them to the window. Ormond followed her. "I told him," he said, pointing, "six postcard-size of those two . . . and an enlargement of *that* one for framing."

She peered at them with the suspicious intentness of the near-sighted, silent for long, long moments. Ormond stood waiting, hands on hips like an athlete waiting direction or assessing a distance. The caller had stepped back a yard from the table, towards the door; he had replaced the envelope in his pocket. But, upper lip lifted, he too waited.

"No," Mary Ann decided at last, with mistress-of-the-home finality, "not an enlargement of that one. It wouldn't frame well . . . not for the parlour *or* anywhere else, Ormond dear."

Ormond sprang. But the man, agilely black as an eel, was out, slithering down the passage before Ormond's raised foot could find relief. "Ormond!" Mary Ann shouted, sprang too, and grabbed her husband by the waistband of his trousers. "Think of the neighbours!" she hissed.

The man escaped.

"Fetch my coat!" Ormond's snort was that of a boiling full-back cheated of the ball by a fouling opponent. Mary Ann, babbling, held on to her husband. He butted her backwards, so that she fell against the oak umbrella-stand. Not more than a few seconds elapsed before he had put on his hairy Harris-tweed jacket of myrtle green and, oblivious to Mary Ann's winded exhortations, streaked out of the house. The man was just disappearing round the corner at the end of the street.

Bylau is not of important dimensions; in fact, it is seldom spotted on maps. Under beetling hills rich with coal, it lies in uncaring sloth towards modern developments, though its little railway station functions, and buses ply in and out of it in haphazard easy-going. The natives know its every cranny, the various treads of its half-dozen police, and exactly what to do in time of trouble. Within three minutes Ormond had collected the following men: Goronwy Jones (from off the steps of the

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Miners' Institute), Wyn Davies (snatched out of The White Hart bar), Pennar Bevan (coming out of a convenience), and Aneirin Evans (standing in reverie before a Labour Party poster). All were miners and members of the Bylau Football Club.

Information was conveyed mostly by gesticulations, Ormond's only vocal explanation being, " That bloke in the black overcoat has stolen something from me; it's in his pocket." For theft, of course, it was; dastardly theft of his good name and odour in Bylau. The stranger, sliding round corners, jerking his head back, clutching his flapping overcoat about him, was kept securely in view all the time.

They headed him out of the shopping Square and away from the railway station, dribbled him through law-abiding Coronation Street and intersecting Pleasant Terrace. Neither pursuers nor pursued hurried now. Outside the colliery manager's villa, the group was joined by Reverend Meurig Morris, a useful inside-right in his day and still a stand-by for an occasional match. " I've got to go to Miss Lloyd-Trealaw's house," the Reverend declared. " I can only give you ten minutes." With his starched dog-collar and round clerical hat he lent the affair a suitable pomp.

Their non-committal progress became that of men enjoying a promenade among well-beloved nooks and haunts too familiar for discussion: silence hung about their prowl. The stranger, kept twenty yards ahead, seemed for a while to pretend that he too was lightly engrossed in a walk among quiet back streets which, however, did not lead him back into the Square with its traffic, plashing fountain, and dutiful policeman standing impartial. Soon three of the group sauntered up a steep street; the other three cut through an alley; thus they manœuvred the culprit into a shady cul-de-sac under the disused colliery coke-ovens.

He cowered, spittle on his lips, against the padlocked door of a shed. But the half hour of plodding pursuit was his sole punishment, and in any case the Reverend would not have countenanced physical blows. Whilst the others stood in a semicircle of thick-set criticism, Ormond inserted his hand into the overcoat pocket, drew the envelope out, carefully looked in it, and stepped back with a mien of completion.

" Let him go, now," he said graciously.

Only the Reverend, naturally a dab at recognizing evil, had a word to say to the man.

" Better mend your ways, whatever you've done," he pronounced. " Otherwise perdition will be your lot." But the man's eyes had become unseeing slits refusing knowledge of anything.

They left him crouched into his overcoat like a bat closed on itself under a barn eave.

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"Pickpocket!" Ormond mumbled to his friends, as they emerged from the cul-de-sac. "Robbed me last Saturday when I was down in Cardiff for the match. No value in the envelope, except what's sentimental to me."

Tactful grunts came from the others, and they parted in the Square for their various evening pleasures. The noses of the cronies had sensed outrage against a son of fair Bylau, and it was enough.

His exalted shout, as he strutted down the passage, proclaimed that all was well. "Mary Ann!" he bellowed, "where are you? Let's go to the pictures. Best seats tonight!"

The kitchen door stood half open, and as he pranced round it something which seemed tremendous smacked him on the crown of his head.

He staggered, stood still in shock, and another blow thumped on the same place; it was followed immediately by a shower of hard-dried haricot beans. He gazed in stupor at the pallid cereals gushing around his feet.

Above him, standing on a chair behind the door, stood a young Queen Boadicea upraised in powerful moral wrath. She had half filled an artificial-silk stocking with the beans and twisted the top, but this cudgel had split with the second blow.

Staring up at her, he experienced the impact of a stranger exploding into vengeful revelation, a secret enemy erupting into naked truth. Mary Ann's glasses shone from a domain of dragons.

"What's the matter?" he growled, taking umbrage, up to a point. They had fought innumerable verbal contests but she had never assaulted him before. "Beans!" he grunted, and stared down again at the floor, perhaps furtively. "Try a bottle next time," he said, attempting bravado. As he stepped to the fire-place rug, crunching the beans, the strut was out of his gait.

Mary Ann did not dismount from the chair, though she gave the door a push, so that it slammed and left them enclosed from any neighbour rash enough to pop in just then. And from that dais she launched a tirade. Anciently hackneyed of theme, it sprang out in rhythmic congress with the heavings of her bosom. It placed his sex low in the structure of the universe. Nameless beasts crawling out of primeval slime, baboons of later date but scarcely more attractive, speaking but no-forehead creatures ambling out of dank caves with clubs in their hirsute hands—these, and marginal embroideries such as serpents, hog-pigs, toads, and billy-goats haunted her abuse.

Yet she did not snatch off her glasses with that ominous gesture

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her husband had learnt to dread. The broken stocking waved from her hand as if she had enchanted it into a whip.

"A woman," she shouted, apparently reaching crescendo, "marries a man with two legs and finds he's got four like the dogs of the street!"

Ormond, twenty-five next birthday, stood on the rug with arms folded and eyelids stretched back as far as they'd go. Instinct informed him that it is always best, in such circumstances, to remain silent—but silent with an engrossed attention and not an insulting indifference. He continued to stare at her whilst she fulfilled herself in speech.

When she stopped, he only remarked, "You said last Saturday you were leaving me for your Auntie Maud's for ever. How was I to know you'd come bouncing back so quick the next day? I'm not God Almighty. I'm only a man."

Still up on the chair, but looking as though she needed a glass of water, Mary Ann panted, "Excuses! Being a man excuses everything!"

"That's how they are," he said, even sombrely. He wanted to light a cigarette but somehow could not, as one can't in a solemn court of law. "How would you like to be married to that crocodile in the black overcoat?" he inquired. "Count your blessings, Mary Ann."

She jumped down from the chair, went to the table, and banged a pot or two about.

Although the onslaughting fury had sunk, still she disclosed an identity new to him. "There's a bit of that villain in every man," she said rhetorically.

Ormond bridled. "Here, that's a nasty insult!" In stern rebuke, he added, "Not so insulting, though, as a married woman running away from her husband to her silly auntie's. A woman that won a scholarship in school, too . . . *and* top prize for good general conduct!" A certificate of these merits hung framed in the parlour: Mary Ann had a passion for framing everything frameable.

"Ha!" She banged the lid on the casserole dish. "A pity they don't give girls lessons about men; we all leave school as big dunces about *them*."

"Boys don't have lessons about women," Ormond said, and, looking surprised himself at his ruminations, proceeded, "That's proper enough; otherwise, we wouldn't have a champion time making big mistakes before settling down."

She jabbed at the wilting dahlias in a pottery vase they had bought during a seaside holiday that summer. "A pretty champion mistake *you* made last Saturday!" she exclaimed.

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"And have dealt with it today in a champion way," he retaliated, not without pride.

The dew was finally off the garden. They recognized it. Ormond crossed to her, took her shoulders, turned her round from the table. She had to be rediscovered. He gave her a shake. A bean fell out of his tight-knit curls and dropped into her bodice of flowered voile. Two pairs of tears also fell from behind her glasses.

"Let me find my bean," he begged.

Later, tidily with handbrush and pan, he swept up all the beans from the floor.

This was exceptional. In Bylau men are not much addicted to domestic jobs, and Ormond in particular, always out with the boys, was not partial to them.

There was a vague aspect of obedient reformation about his figure as he stooped to the task.

"... a double brandy—and a large scythe."

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DAY IN THE DARK

After all these years
that terrace focuses dread

BY ELIZABETH BOWEN

COMING into Moher over the bridge, you may see a terrace of houses by the river. They are to the left of the bridge, below it. Their narrow height and faded air of importance make them seem to mark the approach to some larger town. The six dwellings unite into one frontage, colour-washed apricot years ago. They face north. Their lower sash windows, front steps, and fanlit front doors are screened by lime trees, making for privacy. There are area railings. Between them and the water runs a road with a parapet, which comes to its end opposite the last house.

On the other side of the bridge picturesquely rises a ruined castle—more likely to catch the tourist's eye. Woods, from which the river emerges, go back deeply behind the ruin: on clear days there is a backdrop of Irish-blue mountains. Otherwise, Moher has little to show.

The little place prospers—a market town with a square, on a main road. The hotel is ample, cheerful, and does business. Moreover Moher is, and has been for ages, a milling town. Obsolete stone buildings follow you some way along the river valley as, having passed through Moher, you pursue your road. The flour-white modern mills, elsewhere, hum.

Round the square, shops and pubs are of many colours—in the main Moher looks like a chalk drawing. Not so the valley with its elusive lights.

You *could*, I can see, overlook my terrace of houses—because of the castle, indifference, or haste. I only do not because I am looking out for them. For in No. 4 lived Miss Banderry.

She was the last of a former milling family—last, that is, but for the widowed niece, her pensioner. She owned the terrace, drew rents also from property in another part of the town, and had acquired, some miles out of Moher, a profitable farm which she'd put to management. Had control of the family mills been hers, they would not have been parted with—as it was, she had had to contend with a hopeless brother: he it was who had ended by

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selling out. Her demand for her share of the money left him unable to meet personal debts: he was found hanged from one of the old mill crossbeams.

Miss Banderry lived in retirement, the more thought of for being seldom seen—now and then she would summon a Ford hackney and drive to her farm in it, without warning. My uncle, whose land adjoined on hers, had dealings with her, in the main friendly—which was how they first fell into talk. She, a formidable reader, took to sending him serious magazines, reviews, pamphlets, and so on, with marked passages on which she would be dying to hear his views.

This was her way of harrying him. For my uncle, a winning, versatile, and when necessary inventive talker, fundamentally hated to tax his brain. He took to evading meetings with her as far as possible.

So much I knew when I rang her doorbell.

It was July, a sunless warm afternoon, dead still. The terrace was heavy with limes in flower. Above, through the branches, appeared the bridge with idlers who leaned on the balustrade spying down upon me, or so I thought. I felt marked by visiting this place—I was fifteen, and my every sensation was acute in a way I recall, yet cannot recall.

All six houses were locked in childless silence. From under the parapet came languidly the mesmeric sound of the weir, and, from a window over my head, the wiry hopping of a bird in a cage. From the shabby other doors of the terrace, No. 4's stood out, handsomely though sombrely painted red. It opened.

I came to return a copy of a magazine. Also I carried a bunch of ungainly roses from my uncle's garden, and a request that he might borrow the thistle-cutter from Miss Banderry's farm for use on his land. One rose moulted petals onto her doorstep, then onto the linoleum in the hall.

"Goodness!" complained the niece, who had let me in. "Those didn't travel well. Overblown, aren't they!" I thought that applied to her. "And I'll bet," she said, "*he* never sent those!"

She was not in her aunt's confidence, being treated more or less like a slave. Timed, they said, when she went errands into the town—she dared not stay talking, dared not so much as look into the hotel bar while the fun was on. For a woman said to be forty, this sounded mortifying. Widowed Nan, ready to be handsome, wore a cheated ravenous look. It was understood she would come into the money when the aunt died: she must contain herself till then. As for me—how dared she speak of my uncle with her bad breath?

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Naturally *he* had never thought of the roses. He had commissioned me to be gallant for him any way I chose, and I would not do too badly with these, I'd thought, as I unstrangled them from the convolvulus in the flower bed. They would need not only to flatter but to propitiate, for this copy of the magazine I brought back had buttery thumbmarks on its margins and on its cover a blistered circle where my uncle must have stood down his glass. "She'll be mad," he prophesied. "Better say it was you." So I sacrificed a hair ribbon to tie the roses. It rejoiced me to stand between him and trouble.

"Auntie's resting," the niece warned me, and put me to wait.

The narrow parlour looked out through thick lace to the terrace, which was reflected in a looking-glass at the far end. Ugly though I could see honourable furniture, mahogany, had been crowded in. In the middle, a circular table wore a chenille cloth. This room felt respected though seldom entered—however, it was peopled in one way: generations of oil-painted portraits hung round the walls, photographs overflowed from bracket and ledge even on to the centre table. I was faced, wherever I turned, by one or another member of the family which could only be the vanished Banderrys. There was a marble clock, but it had stopped.

Footsteps halted heavily over the ceiling, but that was all for I don't know how long. I began to wonder what those Banderrys saw—lodging the magazine and roses on the table, I went to inspect myself in the glass. A tall girl in a sketchy cotton dress. Arms thin, no sign yet of a figure. Hair plaited forward over the shoulders, like, said my uncle, a Red Indian maiden's. Barbie was my name.

In memory, the moment before often outlives the awaited moment. I recollect waiting for Miss Banderry—then, nothing till she was with me in the room. I got over our handshake without feeling. On the massiveness of her bust was pinned a diamond-studded enamelled watch, depending from an enamelled bow; there was a tiny glitter as she drew breath.

"So he sent *you*, did he?" She sat down, the better to take a look at me. Her apart knees stretched the skirt of her dress. Her choleric colouring and eyeballs made her appear angry, as against which she favoured me with a racy indulgent smile, to counteract the impression she knew she gave.

"I hear wonders of you," said she, dealing the lie to me like a card.

She sat in reach of the table. "My bouquet, eh?" She grasped the bundle of roses, thorns and all, and took a long voluptuous sniff at them, as though deceiving herself as to their

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origin—showing me she knew how to play the game, if I didn't—then shoved back the roses among the photographs, and turned her eyes on the magazine, sharply.

"I'm sorry, I—" I began. In vain. All she gave was a rumbling chuckle—she held up to me the copy of the magazine open at the page with the most thumbmarks. "I'd know *those* anywhere!" She scrutinized the print for a line or two. "Did he make head or tail of it?"

"He told me to tell you, he enjoyed it." I saw my uncle dallying with the magazine, stuffing himself with the buttered toast. "With his best thanks."

"You're a little echo," she said, not discontentedly.

I stared her out.

"Never mind," she said. "He's a handsome fellow."

I shifted my feet. She gave me a look. She observed: "It's a pity to read at table."

"He hasn't much other time, Miss Banderry."

"Still, it's a poor compliment to you!"

She stung me into remarking: "He doesn't often."

"Oh, I'm sure you're a great companion for him!"

It was as though she saw me casting myself down by my uncle's chair when he'd left the room, or watching the lassitude of his hand hanging caressing a dog's ear. With him I felt the tender bond of sex. Seven, eight weeks with him under his roof, among the copper beeches from spring to summer turning from pink to purple, and I was in love with him. Such things happen, I suppose.

He was my mother's brother, but I had not known him when I was a child. Of his manhood I had had no warning. Naturally growing up into love I was, like the grass growing into hay on his uncut lawns. There was not a danger till she spoke.

"He's glad of company now and then," I said as stupidly as I could.

She plucked a petal from her black serge skirt. "Well," she said, "thank him for the thanks. And you for the nice little pleasure of this visit. Then, there's nothing else?"

"My uncle wants—" I began.

"You don't surprise me," said Miss Banderry. "Well, come on out with it. What this time?"

"If he could once more borrow the thistle-cutter . . .?"

"'Once more!' And what will he be looking to do next year? Get his own mended? I suppose he'd hardly go to that length."

His own, I knew, had been sold for scrap. He was sometimes looking for ready money. I said nothing.

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"Looking to me to keep him out of gaol?" (Law forbids one to suffer the growth of thistles.) "Time after time, it's the same story. It so happens, I haven't my own cut yet!"

"He'd be glad to lend you his jennet back, he says, to draw the cutter for you."

"*That* brute! There'd be nothing for me to cut if it wasn't for what blows in off his dirty land." With the flat of her fingers she pressed one eyeball, then the other, back into her head. She confessed, all at once almost plaintively: "I don't care to have machinery leave my farm."

"Very well," I said haughtily, "I'll tell him."

She leaned back, rubbed her palms on her thighs. "No, wait—this you may tell my lord. Tell him I'm not sure, but I'll think it over. There might be a favourable answer, there might not. If my lord would like to know which, let him come himself. That's a sweet little dress of yours," she went on, examining me inside it, "but it's skimpy. He should do better than hide behind *those* skirts!"

"I don't know what you mean, Miss Banderry."

"He'd know."

"Today, my uncle *was* busy."

"I'm sure he was. Busy day after day. In my life, I've known only one other man anything like so busy as your uncle. And shall I tell you who that was? My poor brother."

After all these years, that terrace focuses dread. I mislike any terrace facing a river. I suppose I would rather look upon it itself—as I must, whenever I cross that bridge—than be reminded of it by harmless others.

True, only one house in it was Miss Banderry's, but the rest belong to her by complicity. An indelible stain is on that monotony—the extinct pink frontage, the road leading to nothing but those six doors which the lime trees, flower as they may, exist for nothing but to shelter. The monotony of the weir and the hopping bird. Within that terrace I was in one room only, and only once.

My conversation with Miss Banderry did not end where I leave off recording it. But at that point memory is torn across, as might be an intolerable page. The other half is missing. For that reason my portrait of her would be incomplete if it *were* a portrait.

She could be novelist's material, I dare say—indeed novels, particularly the French and Irish (for Ireland in some ways resembles France) are full of prototypes of her: oversized women insulated in little provincial towns. Literature, once one

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knows it, drains away some of the shockingness out of life. But when I met her I was unread, my susceptibilities were virgin. I refuse to fill in her outline retrospectively: I show you only what I saw at the time. Not what she was, but what she did to me.

Her amorous hostility to my uncle—or was it hostility making use of a farce?—unsheathed itself when she likened him to the brother she drove to death.

When I speak of dread I mean dread, not guilt. That afternoon, I went to Miss Banderry's for my uncle's sake, in his place. It could be said, my gathering of foreboding had to do with my relation with him—yet in that there was no guilt anywhere, I could swear! I swear we did each other no harm.

I think he was held that summer, as I was, by the sense that this was a summer like no other and which could never again be. Soon I must grow up, he must grow old. Meanwhile we played house together on the margin of a passion which was impossible. My longing was for him, not for an embrace—as for him, he was glad of companionship, as I'd truly told her. He was a man tired by a lonely house till I joined him—a schoolgirl between schools. All thought well of his hospitality to me. Family convention was our safeguard: could one have stronger?

I left No. 4 with ceremony. I was offered raspberry cordial, Nan bore in the tray with the thimble glasses—educated by going visiting with my uncle, I knew refusal would mark a breach. When the glasses were emptied, Nan conducted me out of the presence, to the hall door—she and I stopped aimlessly on the steps. Across the river throve the vast new mills, unabashed, and cars swished across the tree-hidden bridge. The niece showed a reluctance to go in again—I think the bird above must have been hers. She glanced behind her, then, conspiratorially at me. "So now you'll be going to the hotel?"

"No. Why?"

"'Why?'" she jibed. "Isn't he waiting there for you? Anyway, that's where you'll find him. His car's as large as life outside, in the square."

I said, "But I'm taking the bus home."

"Now, why ever?"

"Because I came in that way."

"You're mad. What, with his car there waiting?"

All I could say was: "How d'you know?"

"I slipped out just now," said the niece, "since you're asking. Into town, into one shop only, but I went by the hotel. That was while you were chatting with Auntie."

She laughed, perhaps at her life, but then gave a shove at me,

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impatiently. "Get on—wherever you're going to! Anybody would think you were an image!"

Not till I was almost on the bridge did I hear No. 4's door shut behind me.

I leaned on the balustrade, at the castle side. The river, coming towards me out of the distances of woods, washed the bastions and carried a paper boat—this, travelling at uncertain speed on the current, listed as it vanished under the bridge. I had not the heart to wonder how it would fare.

Weeks ago, when first I came to my uncle's, here we had lingered, elbow to elbow, looking up-river through the green-hazed spring hush at the far-off swan's nest, now deserted. Next I raised my eyes to the splendid battlements, kissed by the sky where they were broken.

From the bridge to the town rises a slow hill—shops and places of business come down to meet you, converting the road into a street. There are lamp posts, signboards, yard gates pasted with layers of bills, and you tread pavement. That day the approach to Moher, even the crimson valerian on stone walls, was filmed by imponderable white dust as though the flourbags had been shaken. To me, this was the pallor of suspense.

An all but empty theatre was the square, which, when I entered it at a corner, paused between afternoon and evening. In the middle were parked cars, looking forgotten—my uncle's was nearest the hotel.

The hotel, glossy with green creeper, occupied one entire end of the square. It reflected the prosperity of Moher. Row upon row, its plate-glass windows were as polished as jet, in their white frames. Having been a post-house in coaching days, it now was a popular stopping-place for motorists—few travelling the main road did not turn in there. Therefore the bar, at which the *bona fide* could be served a drink any time of day, was famous for the exchange of news, rumours, hearsay from every part of the country. So was the coffee-room with its crowded tables.

But the hotel's flavour and great gaiety were not only due to the itinerants: this was the rendezvous of the local gentry, the farmers, and the swaggering in-between types. Boasting and betting, no worse ever went on—the proprietress was very strict morally. Woe to any man in *her* black books! My uncle, with his bravado, was, I need hardly tell you, among the welcome. Indeed he was one of the magnets of the place . . . A cream porch, figuring the name in gold, projected over the big doorway.

Though I kept my back to that, I expected any moment to hear a yell as I searched for the independence of my bus. But where that should have waited, I found nothing. Nothing, at

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this bus end of the square, but a drip of grease on dust and a torn ticket.

" She's gone out, if that's what you're looking for," said a by-stander. So there it went, carrying passengers I was not among to the scenes of safety, and away from me every hope of solitude.

Out of reach was the savingness of a house empty. Out of reach, the windows down to the ground open upon the purple beeches and lazy hay, the dear weather of those rooms in and out of which flew butterflies, my cushions on the floor, my blue striped tea mug. Out of reach, the whole of the lenient meaning of my uncle's house, which most filled it when he was not there . . . I did not want to be bothered with him, I think.

" She went out on time today, more's the pity."

Down hung my hair in two weighted ropes as I turned away.

Moher square is oblong. Down its length, on the two sides, people started to come to the shop doors in order to look at me in amazement. They knew who I was and where he was: what should *I* be wanting to catch the bus for? They speculated. For, for any extraordinary action there is a reason. All watched to see what I would do next—as though a sandal chafed me I bent down, spent some time loosening the strap.

Then, as though I had never had any other thought, I started in the direction of the hotel.

At the same time, my uncle appeared in the porch. He tossed a cigarette away, put the hand in a pocket, and stood there under the gold lettering. He was not a lord, only a land-owner. Facing Moher, he was all carriage and colouring: he wore his life like he wore his coat—though, now he was finished with the hotel, a light hint of melancholy settled down on him. He was not looking for me until he saw me.

We met at his car.

He asked, " How was she, the old terror? "

" I don't know."

" She didn't eat you? "

" No," I said, shaking my head.

" Or send me another magazine? "

" No. Not this time."

" Thank God."

He opened the car door and touched my elbow, reminding me to get in.

★ ★ ★

PREMIUM BOND

Most women pine for bondage, most men for vagabondage.

HESKETH PEARSON

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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

DANGEROUS STRUCTURE

What can you do about robbery when it's legal?

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

HELENWOOD House was built, in the early years of the last century, by a successful Special Pleader. He built generously, for he had a wife and eleven children to house, in brickwork, cream-painted stucco, and imitation Bath stone; and he surrounded his home with a garden and a high iron fence. Those were spacious days, when tea-brokers from Mincing Lane drove out to their mansions on Muswell Hill, and the nightingale sang on Highside.

The years went past, Highside descended in the social scale, and Helenwood House descended with it, but more slowly, for it was insulated from the march of time by its high fence and by an ever-thickening jungle of shrubs and trees.

Its barrister owner died, but the complex settlement that he had made lived after him, and the tentacles of the law gripped Helenwood House more tightly even than the ivy that now enshrouded it.

Had it been taken in hand in the 'twenties or 'thirties it might have been rescued, and opened up, and turned into an apartment house—for which there is great demand in Highside. But by that time it was under the control of Trustees and was occupied by two elderly ladies and five cats.

Anobium domesticum, the death-watch beetle, made lodgement in the timbers; and, creeping out from the shrubberies, polyporus destructor, curiously miscalled dry-rot, cast its dripping cloak over the brickwork of the basement and reached up white and yellow fingers to make a meal of the ground-floor woodwork.

The best thing for all concerned would have been a direct hit from Hitler's air force, but where so many more useful buildings suffered, Helenwood House remained, decrepit but intact.

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In the late 'forties it was inhabited by one old lady and seventeen cats. The local authority toyed for a time with the idea of serving a dangerous structure notice on the occupant, and might have done so, had the old lady not quietly died, leaving only the cats to serve the notice on. The property then became the subject of protracted litigation.

Detective Sergeant Petrella knew a certain amount about all this, as he knew a certain amount about most of the houses and people in his manor. To him Helenwood House was a place whose defences had constantly to be watched and strengthened against the incursion of children to whom the ruined house and rampant shrubberies were a fascinating playground, jungle, and enchanted palace in one. And against tramps who would force one of the many broken and boarded-up windows and sleep quite happily in the basement, along with anobium and polyporus.

It was Mrs. Catt, Petrella's amiable landlady, who called his attention to Helenwood House one morning when she brought him his tea.

"Someone's going to do *what*?" said Petrella sleepily. He had spent much of the previous night in unsuccessful watching on a warehouse and brought himself back reluctantly to the problems of a new day.

"Do it up," said Mrs. Catt. "Regardless."

"That old mausoleum!" said Petrella. "It'd be cheaper to start over again than mess about with that."

"It's a house of great character," said Mrs. Catt, who had the sort of mind that believed in house agents' advertisements, "Architect designed, on four storeys."

"It's a death trap," said Petrella, and finished his tea at a gulp. He had a lot of work to do that day. Most of it was connected with young Maurice Meister, who was fast qualifying as Highside's leading juvenile delinquent. His current activity was "milking" telephone boxes, and he had a sideline in stealing from parked cars.

Crime was the hereditary occupation of the Meisters. Maurice's father was none other than "Bull" Meister, the suspected organizer of the famous series of mail-van robberies in which fifty thousand pounds' worth of old pound notes, on their way to the pulping mills, had been diverted into the pockets of Bull and his gang. He was at that moment serving a three-year sentence, not for any of his more lucrative crimes, but for cutting off the right ear of one of his subordinates with whom he had had a difference of opinion.

"His mother's just as bad," said Petrella to Superintendent Haxtell. "I'd say she was running the Meister crowd herself

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now. Keeping it warm till Bull comes out again. What do you expect a boy like Maurice to do—sell tracts?"

"I expect him to behave," said Haxtell sourly. "And if he doesn't, I expect you to tell him where he gets off. Don't let's have you getting soft about juvenile delinquents."

That evening Mrs. Catt reopened the subject of Helenwood House. "What I was telling you," she said without preamble, "it's being converted. Into six self-contained apartments, of convenient size."

"You're not thinking of moving, are you?" said Petrella. The thought was alarming. He knew that he would never find lodgings that suited him so well.

"'Snot me," said Mrs. Catt. "My married daughter. They've been living with his family. 'Snot a good arrangement."

Petrella agreed. Highside, being within easy travelling distance of the centre of London, had an even more acute housing problem than most boroughs.

"They've saved money, both of them. Not enough to buy a house, but then they don't want a house. They want a flat."

Almost everyone in Highside wanted a flat.

"How much are they paying?" said Petrella. He was wide awake, this time, and the implications of what he was being told did not escape him.

"'Each applicant,'" quoted Mrs. Catt, "'is asked to put down the sum of five hundred pounds. Three hundred of which will be used towards conversion of the premises, two hundred being considered as rent for the first year.'"

"How many apartments?"

"Six."

"There's a catch somewhere," said Petrella. "Work it out for yourself. I don't say the house would cost much to buy. The owners would be glad to get rid of it. But there'd be legal fees and so forth. Say you did that for a thousand pounds, right? Well, six times three is eighteen. That leaves you eight hundred pounds to develop the property with. Why, it'd cost that to deal with the dry-rot alone."

The gloom on Mrs. Catt's face deepened. "It did sound almost too good to be true," she said.

"Who's the operator?"

Mrs. Catt produced a piece of paper from her pocket, and the fact that she had it ready confirmed Petrella's suspicion that his landlady had not introduced the subject of Helenwood House entirely by chance. He read, *Utopia Building and Development Projects Limited.*

"It's a good-sounding name," said Mrs. Catt.

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"It sounds all right," said Petrella, pocketing the paper. "But the only word I should believe in myself is the last one."

Scotland Yard possesses a Company Fraud Department and Petrella knew a Sergeant Brennan who worked there. Brennan had spent his early years on a beat round the Old Kent Road. He had been promoted to his present job when his superiors discovered that he possessed the sort of mind that delighted in solving crossword puzzles or in playing several games of chess simultaneously.

"These sort of people make me sick," he said to Petrella. "Give me a drunken Irishman with a bottle. You do know where you are with him. It'll take a few days to ferret out, because all the shares, you can bet, will be in the names of nominees. We can usually dig out the real holders, but it takes time."

Petrella thanked Sergeant Brennan, and made his way back to Highside. He found Mrs. Catt looking even more worried.

"I bin asking round," she said. "From what I hear this company's been showing these flats to dozens of people. There ought to be a law against it."

"I thought it must be something like that," said Petrella.

Having no further duty that evening, he strolled out on a course which would bring him past the top end of Helenwood House. Sure enough, there was a triumphant red SOLD notice nestling among a clump of giant elders. Petrella noted the name of the agents, Messrs. Trentice and Partners, and was on the point of moving on when something caught his eye.

Bending forward, he gripped the rusty, spiked iron upright which formed part of the formidable boundary defences at this point. He twisted it, and it lifted, coming up through the rail. A foot from the top the metal was worn bright with friction in the socket. What he had found was a well-used backdoor. The gap was wide enough to admit a large boy, or a slim policeman. Petrella squatted down and eased his way through, replacing the bar behind him. For the next few yards he had to crawl, then he got to his feet.

He was standing in a hollowed-out space in the heart of the shrubbery. And somewhere ahead of him—his nose told him—a wood fire was burning. He tiptoed forward. Then stopped. He knew that he was being watched. He heard a rustle, swung round, and something hit him on the cheek. It was an iron-hard pellet of folded paper, and it had been shot with such force that it stung like an adder. Then the silence was broken by laughter, and the crackling of running steps.

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Petrella did not give chase. He followed his nose through the labyrinth, until he found the fire. It was smouldering damply among the moss and leaves, and he stamped it carefully out. Then he returned the way he had come.

As he stooped to lift the railing he looked back. A face was watching him from the nearest thicket; a face which split into a grin when it saw it was observed.

"You get out of there," said Petrella. "And your pals. Before you get into any more trouble."

Young Maurice Meister continued to grin but said nothing.

Petrella saw Mr. Trentice next morning and warned him to strengthen the defences of Helenwood House. But he knew it was a waste of time. There were a dozen places in the boundary where a determined boy could break through.

"If we blocked one, they'd open another," said Mr. Trentice. "And that'd mean more damage. Thank goodness it'll soon be off our hands."

"How's the sale going?" asked Petrella.

"A deposit's been paid," said Mr. Trentice cautiously. "And a contract signed. Otherwise we wouldn't have handed over the keys." He added that it was not his firm that had the job of showing prospective tenants round. That was done personally by the managing director of the new company.

Petrella was on the point of asking for the name of the managing director, but realized, just in time, that Mr. Trentice would refuse to give it to him. In fact, he need have answered none of his questions. No offence had been committed. A swindle was in course of being perpetrated in front of Petrella's eyes. A swindle in which a number of people, of slender means, were to be robbed of their life's savings; but if it happened to be legal robbery there was nothing to be done about it.

What Sergeant Brennan told him two days later confirmed Petrella's first instinctive feeling.

"This company of yours," said Brennan, "it's run by a chap called Clark. Neighbour of yours, actually. He's got an office near the Station. Clark's his present name. He changes it about once a year, all by due process of law. And he must have operated at least a hundred companies. Some have done quite well. Others have gone bust. I guess the Utopia Whatsit & Whatsit is one which is going to fold up."

"Can't it be stopped?"

"It's difficult," said Brennan. "Here's this company. The company, mind you, not Clark. It says to you, we're buying certain properties and converting them into flats. As a gesture of good faith it pays a fifty-quid deposit on some old shambles of

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a property, and gets hold of the keys. Then it starts showing people over. And collects five hundred pounds from each of them. Ten—twenty—thirty people—or however many it can get interested."

"It's clearly a fraud," said Petrella. "You couldn't make twenty flats out of Helenwood House."

"Of course you couldn't," said Brennan wearily. "But what's to prevent the company buying more houses? It might too, if things go well. But sooner or later, and in this case probably sooner, it'll go bust."

"This Clark character, he's got money of his own?"

"You bet he's got money."

"Then if I was one of his customers, I'd sue him for my £500."

"You're not dealing with him. You could sue the company, of course. Only by that time it's got no money left. What there was has been spent. On management expenses."

"That means by Mr. Clark on Mr. Clark."

"Right."

"What a set-up," said Petrella. He thought of Mrs. Catt, and her daughter, and her daughter's husband, and the money that they had saved.

"What can anyone do?"

"There's just one chance," said Brennan. "If you strike the right moment, near the beginning of the ramp when there is a little money in the kitty and all the mugs aren't in, and slap in a writ, you might get your stake back just to keep you quiet."

"I'd judge it's already too late for that," said Petrella. "This particular racket's been running for weeks. Would it be any good if I called on him and tried to scare him?"

"Certainly. If you want him to get straight through on the blower to your Superintendent inquiring what authority you'd got for threatening him."

"I see," said Petrella.

Nevertheless he made a point of being at the end of the road when Mr. Clark emerged from his office that evening. He saw a small stout person with a figure like a ripe pear and a face like a frog; if you can imagine a frog wearing rimless glasses. Behind the glasses a pair of liquid brown eyes looked out on the world. Nor did the eyes miss much.

Mr. Clark came straight across the road to where Petrella was standing, said, "Good evening, Sergeant," and passed on. Petrella was on the point of departing himself when the door of the office block opened for a second time, and a girl came out. A girl, moreover, whom he recognized.

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Later that evening he visited the all-night café in Exover Street and had a word with its proprietor, Sam Peggs.

"I never knew your daughter worked locally," he said. "I thought you told me she'd got a job with some solicitor in Lincoln's Inn."

"So she had," said Mr. Peggs, who was a large man and served large meals to his customers, but himself lived almost entirely off bismuth tablets. "And a good job, too. But I had to fix it so's she could be home lunch-times. Her mother's been took bad lately."

"So she works for Mr. Clark?"

"That's right," said Peggs. "He's in house property. Nothing wrong with him, I suppose?"

Petrella took a deep breath. He liked Sam Peggs, and had always found him trustworthy.

"If your daughter can turn up anything," he said quietly, "I'd just like to hear about it."

"Like that, is it?" said Peggs. "Well, she might be able to help. Between you and me, I don't think she's got a lot of use for him. Personally speaking. He keeps her late—after hours—you know."

"You mean he makes passes at her?"

Sam Peggs loosed a sudden bellow of laughter that rattled the coffee urn. "You want to brush up your psychology, boy," he said. "He keeps her late and *don't* make passes at her. That's what makes a girl mad."

After which a week went by. A week in which Petrella got on with a lot of other jobs and tried to forget about Helenwood House. And was reminded of it every time he saw Mrs. Catt.

He gathered that the conversion had not started yet. "He's going to have a narkiteck round soon. Measuring up," said Mrs. Catt, but she didn't say it very hopefully.

Then, at ten o'clock one night, just as Petrella was leaving the C.I.D. room, the telephone rang. It was Sam Peggs, and even allowing for the distortion of a bad line, Petrella could tell that he was excited.

"Drop in for a cuppa on your way home," he said. "I heard something that's going to make you laugh."

Five minutes later Petrella was listening to Peggs with growing incredulity. "Are you sure?" he said.

"Certain," said Mr. Peggs. "She's a good girl. Wooden' make a mistake about a thing like that. The switchboard's in her room. She's only got to plug in. Listen to everything."

"And he turned it down?"

"Turned it down flat. You asked for something funny, and

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if that isn't funny, what is? He gives five hundred pounds for a rotten old house—and when I say gives it, he hasn't even done that yet. Just paid fifty for a deposit. And now this woman comes along and offers him three thousand for it. And he turns it down. Flat."

"Perhaps he really does intend to develop the property."

"Develop my second-best trousers," said Mr. Peggs. "From what my girl tells me, it's a stone-cold ramp."

"Then why did he turn down a nice quick profit of two thousand five hundred?"

"You haven't heard half of it. Hour later she rings again. Now she's offering three thousand five hundred. That's her last word, she says. Only the way she says it makes it sound as if she might raise a bit more steam if you pushed her."

"And Clark turned that down too?"

"He's wavering," said Mr. Peggs.

"Look here," said Petrella, "this sounds like a miracle. I want to know the minute Clark says yes. And I want an introduction to the solicitor your daughter worked for. If what I've got in mind comes off, I know someone who'll buy your daughter a new evening dress. And I'll take her dancing myself the first time she wears it."

"Do what we can," said Mr. Peggs.

The following afternoon the call came through. "Old Clark's done it," said Peggs. "After lunch. Four thousand smackers."

"Is it just talk? Or is it settled?"

"Signed, sealed, and delivered. Very businesslike lady. Brought round a contract with her. Signed it on the spot."

"Excellent," said Petrella, "excellent. The first thing Clark'll find on his desk tomorrow will be a writ for £500. Let's see him wriggle out of this one."

"Another funny thing," said Mr. Peggs. "Guess who the lady was?"

"Whoever she was, she was an angel in disguise."

"Heavily disguised," said Mr. Peggs with a throaty chuckle. "It was Bull Meister's old lady, Annie."

"Mrs. Meister!"

"'Sright."

Petrella said, "Good lord," softly, and put down the telephone.

Up to that point he had been obsessed with the personal aspects of his battle of wits with Mr. Clark. Now, quite suddenly, he forgot about Mr. Clark and Mrs. Catt and Mrs. Catt's married daughter and Utopia Developments, and started thinking like a policeman again.

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And as he did so, a pattern came to light. A pattern of startling and satisfactory simplicity.

The redoubtable Bull Meister, perpetrator of the mail-van robbery, earns himself a three-year sentence, which still has a month or two to run. Bull's own share of the robbery, between twenty and thirty thousand old but still quite serviceable pound notes, is never recovered.

And now Mrs. Meister is prepared to lay out four thousand hard-earned pounds, and for what? For an ancient and decaying building like Helenwood House. A building in whose grounds, moreover, he had himself caught young Maurice Meister, only a day or two before.

"It's a snip," he said enthusiastically, to Superintendent Haxtell. "And what brought Mrs. Meister finally out into the open?"

"You tell me," said Haxtell.

"Why, the fact that Clark announced that he was going to put an architect in to measure up for conversion. He probably didn't mean it. It was done to keep his subscribers quiet. But it produced Mrs. Meister, in a sweat, with four thousand pounds in her pocket."

"Yes," said Haxtell. "It looks as if you could be right. What do you suggest?"

"I'd suggest," said Petrella, "that we borrow a couple of professional searchers from Central and go right in tonight. Unofficially. If anyone makes a fuss we can always say we were looking for tramps."

The Superintendent considered the matter carefully, from all possible angles, and then said, "Do you know, I think I'll come with you myself. It's a long time since I've been on a treasure hunt."

They found Bull Meister's hoard, packed in biscuit tins, sealed with adhesive tape, and stacked in an old recess beside the chimney front in the best bedroom.

It was a neat job.

The recesses on both sides had been masked with plywood and covered with distemper. The cache came to light only when the professional searchers, one of whom was a qualified architect, had made certain measurements and deductions.

On Haxtell's suggestion they replaced the plywood as carefully as they had removed it.

So far as they were aware no one observed them either coming or going.

"There's no problem about the notes," said Haxtell. "We'll

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tell the Bank they've been recovered and they can continue quietly on their journey to the pulping mill. The real question is, what else do we do?"

"I don't really see, sir," said Petrella slowly, "that we need actually do anything at all. My landlady's married daughter got a cheque for £500 this morning. And the rest of the business looks like sorting itself out very satisfactorily. Really, very satisfactorily indeed."

"What's in your mind?"

"Well," said Petrella, and there was an almost ecstatic note in his voice, "don't you see? Bull's due out very shortly, and he's bound to think that Clark found the notes and removed them.

"And not only removed them, but sold the house to Bull's wife for four thousand pounds. I should think he'd cut off both his ears, at least, wouldn't you?"

"I can't tell you how much our readers are enjoying your short short stories."

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STUFF OF DREAMS

Brown and crisp, crunchy, fragrant
—and his for the taking

BY HELEN DORE BOYLSTON

SHAH first met Sadie Thompson in the apple tree. He was lying far out on a branch in the sun, his caramel-coloured paws tucked under his chest, his golden ruff a halo around his flowerlike little face. The red-gold plume of his tail flowed back along the limb.

In all the spring morning there was no sound except the twittering of birds. The warm sweetness of the earth drifted up to him. His eyes closed.

Something scrambled under the fence at the back of the garden. Shah's eyes flew open. He stared, incredulous. She was coming across the garden, Shah's own garden, invading it, mincing and dainty, a half-grown black kitten with high white boots and small yellow eyes, as expressionless as marbles. She was larger than Shah and her fur was very short and sleek.

She made straight for the tree, climbed it with impressive, ripping bounds, and approached Shah on his branch, heedless of his frightened hissing. He backed away as far as the limb would permit, but she came on steadily. The orange of Shah's eyes was drowned in black. He arched, with enormous tail.

Reserve was unknown to Sadie. She loomed over him. She breathed on him. She sniffed along his quivering and appalled whiskers, her blackness very smooth beside his golden fluffiness. Her tongue rasped on his coral nose, worked along his cheek, and up to his tufted ear.

Somewhere, at some other time, another tongue had licked him so. Another paw had lain across his back. And it had been pleasant. His terror subsided and he relaxed, bowing his head to the onslaught.

When he had been washed until his bright fur stood up in long, damp spears all over his body, Sadie settled on the limb beside him and did her nails. Her tail hung down behind her, long, black, and elegant.

Shah looked at it. Sadie wasn't noticing. Her wrinkling nose was buried in the spread toes of a hind foot. Shah reached out a

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tentative claw, and hooked the tail. Sadie nibbled on. Emboldened, Shah patted her face and shrank back when she put down her leg and rose. But she only moved along the limb, pausing to look over her shoulder at him.

"Prrrt!" she said.

Shah pattered after her, enchanted.

She dashed down the tree-trunk, head first, and sprang to the ground. Shah was admiring but embarrassed. After a moment of indecision he peered down the vast wall of the trunk. It had a great many smooth places, and the ground was so far away . . . In sudden obstinacy Shah turned, lowered himself over the limb, and backed down ignominiously, clinging to the friendly bark, his furry stomach pressed close against it. The ground received him at last and he hurried after Sadie.

She ran along the garden path to a tangle of grass and bushes at the back—a dank, cool jungle. Shah's eyes were very big as he pushed through behind her. She squeezed under the fence, and Shah, following, entered a new world of space and sun and weeds.

While he hesitated, bewildered, Sadie made a black streak into the air after a fly, missed it, came down without a sound, and melted into nothing behind a clump of grass. Shah brightened and his whiskers moved forward. He crouched and sprang, his little body an orange flame in the sun. They met, head on, and, clutching each other, rolled among the weeds. Sadie's hind feet encountered Shah's chin and she kicked it with steady rhythm. Her fur filled his mouth.

Sadie tore herself free at last and fled. Shah bounded after her, tail high. The grass blurred greenly past him and gave place to low, grey mounds. Shah halted with a little bounce.

Grey dust settled on him and strange odours came to his nose. Sadie was prowling, long and sinuous, on top of one of the mounds. Her tail twitched, her whiskers quivered.

Shah sniffed and was backing away in distaste when a thin, sweet smell, drifting on a breeze, drew him forward again. He set his paws down carefully, avoiding bits of broken glass, a doll's wig, and a heap of lemon rinds. Flashes of sunlight jumped from tin can to tin can, and something stirred under his paws. He spat sharply, but the smell drew him on, up the mound, to where a condensed-milk tin lay on its side. A little trickle of milk came from it.

"Mrrrt!" Shah called.

Sadie came in a scrambling run. Her eyes glittered. Shah drew back graciously and waited until her round black head was bent over the rich find. Then he joined her; red cheek against black, they lapped up the thick sweetness.

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Shah withdrew first, leaving Sadie the last drop. He shook out his ruff and, sitting down, was lifting a paw to his whiskers when his nose caught the first whiff of something that stirred him to the very tips of his toes.

His paw dropped. He rose; moving with the stiffness of one hypnotized, he went straight up the mound of ashes and down the other side. His nose had not deceived him. There it lay, his for the taking, brown and shiny, dried by wind and sun, washed by rain, but still pungent—an exquisite fish head!

Shah gazed upon it in silent rapture. Never, in all his life, had such a gift been laid before him. Never before had his nose been blessed with such a smell—succulent, soul-stirring, beautiful. A high, tenor purr began in his little chest. Sadie was forgotten. His ears were deaf to the sound of a low, excited yowl. He realized nothing until Sadie shot under his chin and crouched, growling, over his treasure.

Shah's ears flattened against his head in shocked surprise. Then they lifted and he stepped forward, confidently, to share. It was over in an instant! Claws raked his nose and he fell back, blinded with pain, his mouth opening in a soundless shriek. He shook his head and wiped at his nose with a trembling paw, but the pain wouldn't come off. The sound of snarling continued.

When Shah could see, he moved a prudent distance away and sat down. His whiskers drooped miserably and his eyes were very big.

The change in Sadie was beyond belief. She was no longer the motherly little cat, nor the gay companion, but a stranger from whose body came a sickening, brassy odour of hatred. Her eyes blazed and her tail lashed the ashes into a semicircle of dust.

Even as Shah watched, her teeth sank deep into the fish head with a crackling sound. Shah's mouth watered. Outraged, he saw her lift his personal property from the ground, saw it sticking out on either side of her head, crisp and tempting. Its fragrance almost overcame him.

Still crouching, Sadie turned with a weaving motion of her head and was gone—back along the way they had come. Her tail was not jaunty now. It slithered behind her, close to the ground. Shah hurried after her, keeping at a safe distance. She darted under the fence into his own garden and Shah cried out at the added insult.

In the middle of the garden, on the new grass, Sadie laid Shah's fish head down with tenderness and gloating. Shah stood still, Sadie walked around the prize glancing out of the corner of her eye at the anxious little figure beyond. Her whiskers twitched

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and the corners of her mouth curled upward. Then, elaborately unaware of him, she inserted a paw beneath the jewel, flipped it into the air, batted it a foot or two in Shah's direction, and when he stepped forward, all eagerness, she sprang upon it, growling.

The black pools of Shah's eyes blazed. His whiskers stood forward until they almost met before his stinging nose. The watered silk of his flanks, burning red and orange in the sun, trembled with the explosions of his breath.

Sadie danced before the fish head in curves and arabesques. She curled around it. She killed it with pomp, restored it to life with ceremony. She was a black feather, a drift of smoke, an exclamation point of delight. And all the while her eyes glittered at Shah's agony.

He was pacing back and forth now, unable to endure that sight, unable to tear his eyes from it. The brush of his tail drooped behind him. Another drop of blood was gathering on his nose. At that moment, George, Shah's own Scottie, came round a distant corner of the house. Shah's tail swept upward and the furrows of anxiety on his forehead were smooth stripes again. He opened his mouth in a long wail for help.

George, always the gentleman, removed his nose from the trail of his own affairs, and waved his tail in response, but he had not understood, and after a moment went on his way.

Shah's tail dropped slowly down.

The noon sun shone in benign indifference. The little heat waves over the garden were saturated with the smell of fish, and insects, emerging from under stones, toiled through the wilderness of grass in search of it. Shah's tongue trembled over his lips as Sadie paused in her frolicking to bite into the dream of dreams. It crunched brownly, and Shah wailed aloud.

The door of Shah's kitchen opened and the cook's voice issued from it. Sadie, startled, turned to look, leaving the fish head unprotected for the briefest of moments. In that moment Shah was a silent golden streak across the grass. His teeth met between bones and he fled, straight for that open door, and through it into the warm kitchen. He crept into the steamy darkness under the stove and waited there, breathless.

Presently there was a commotion in the kitchen. Windows were thrown open and the cook's voice was shrill. Her lumps of feet shadowed back and forth in front of Shah's hiding-place with increasing rapidity. They paused. There were grunts, a thump, and heavy breathing near the door. Shah's heart pounded in his throat, but he remained motionless.

Then his eyes and the cook's met over the fish head.

A hand, at the end of a fat arm, came under the stove, groped,

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caught Shah by the scruff of the neck, and dragged him out. His treasure was wrenched from his jaws—though not before he had left long red marks on the cook's arm. He hit the floor, hard. The kitchen door was jerked open, and the fish head sailed through it in a splendid arc.

Shah raced through the door after it, but he was too late. The triumphant Sadie was already climbing into the apple tree, carrying the fish head. He followed her grimly, but without hope.

She clambered on, far up into the topmost branches, wedged the fish head into a little crotch, and bunched herself on a limb just below.

Shah began his vigil slightly farther down. Neither looked at the other. Above them the fish head was a brown triangle against the tender green of new leaves.

Shah had eaten nothing since the few drops of condensed milk that morning and his inside was a large and draughty emptiness, but he made no move to descend. One caramel paw was tucked under his chest, the other extended along the limb, and upon this, after a while, he rested his chin. His golden whiskers lay back along his cheeks until their curving tips touched his ruff. His tail hung down, and his orange eyes were fixed, unblinking, on the brown triangle above.

Sadie was two solid black circles melting together against the sky—a large one, and a small one with ears. Her yellow eyes stared at nothing.

The kitchen door opened and a familiar and beloved voice called out words that Shah knew. "Shah!" it said. "Come! Dinner!"

Shah's head lifted and the emptiness inside him began to ache, but he remained where he was. He gave one beseeching little cry when the door closed, but that was all.

The shadow of the tree-trunk grew longer. A breeze stirred among the leaves and blew away a swarm of gnats that had been jigging around Shah's head. There was a sudden flutter as a pair of robins invaded the tree, hopping from twig to twig, chattering. Shah and Sadie looked up hungrily, but continued glued to their branches.

The leaves whispered above them. From far away a sound of hammering came to them on the wind. The air was sweet with the smell of grass and heavy with wood smoke. Shah's coral nose quivered. His emptiness was a sharp pain now, and he shifted uneasily on his branch. Sadie did not move.

The beloved voice called again, from an open window, and Shah called back desperately. The porch door opened at once and She came out, hurrying across the garden to the apple tree.

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Shah's chest fur trembled with the hopeful beating of his heart. His little face, furrowed with hunger, peered down at Her.

"Shah—my foolish! What is it? Come down! Dinner!"

Shah didn't wail this time. He squalled, pink mouth wide, ears back. Sadie stared but said nothing.

"Come, Shah! Dinner!"

"Eee-yow!" Shah screamed, clinging to his branch. His emptiness roared in his ears.

After a time She went away.

The brown tree shadows slowly deepened to blue and a chill crept into the air. Shah wrapped his tail around him for warmth. The leaves hung motionless, and the robins, with a final twitter, swooped away. Sadie was a motionless black lump. In the west the wings of the sunset trailed scarlet across a lemon-yellow sky, and the breath of the fields was a white mist. Lights came on in Shah's house.

Something moved in the gloom below. She had returned—with a ladder. Shah mewed hysterically, peeking over his branch. The ladder scraped against the trunk, the tree shook a little, and Her voice came nearer, speaking to Shah. At the sound of it Sadie uncoiled and stretched upward, swift and black.

Shah heard the lovely crunch as her teeth met in the fish head. Unseen leaves rustled violently, higher up. Shah followed instantly. His heart sank as he climbed, for Her voice was suddenly angry. "Bad!" it said. But he went on up, little and orange and determined.

Sadie had settled down again, beside the fish head. There was no comfortable place for Shah and he was forced to lie upwards along a branch and hold with his claws.

After a moment he looked down. She was on the ground again, and taking away the ladder in an unpleasant silence. Then Her feet swished across the grass. The kitchen door was a sudden oblong of light—then darkness.

The first stars were flaring above him when Shah heard, far in the distance, the terrifying wail of a siren. It grew louder every second. All the doors of his house opened and there was running in the driveway. Out in the road passing cars drew hastily to one side with a squealing of brakes; there was a babel of voices.

Two long cones of light swept down the highway and the screaming wail came with them. They swung ponderously at the drive entrance and crept in, drawing behind them something long and high and red. It clattered. The wailing died away to a whine and ceased. An engine throbbed—stopped. In the silence Her voice spoke alone, apologetic.

There was laughter, and more clattering. The cones of light

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moved, turned, and focused on the suddenly golden tree. Shah's claws almost lost their grip. People tramped across the grass carrying another ladder, very long, very red. Other people made a semicircle of grinning faces on the edge of the light.

The ladder reared into the air and grew longer and longer. It squeaked, and Shah's ears pricked forward nervously. His eyes widened in terror as the uppermost prongs of it reached a level with his face and remained there, not resting against anything. A dark shape in a shining helmet detached itself from the group below and began to mount the ladder, which swayed.

The figure came steadily higher, nearer and nearer to the paralysed Shah. It said something to the people below in a voice quite like George's—a definite bark—and the ladder squeaked again. Just over Shah's head there was a stealthy, frightened movement. It was very slight, but Shah heard it and looked up. Sadie's branch was empty. She had gone only the night knew where—and she had left the fish head behind!

Everything else was forgotten. Shah was a whirlwind among the leaves.

When a large masculine hand closed on the scruff of his neck he scarcely knew it. Crisp brownness filled his mouth, pricked his throat until his eyes bulged, drowned his nostrils with its exquisite pungency. His teeth met in crackling succulence. His ecstatic purr was strained through scales and delicious, crumbling bones.

Shah came down the ladder dangling from the hand, not hearing the cheers that burst from the darkness. Into a circle of light Her hands reached to take him—hands that understood. He nestled into them, exhausted but trusting.

One of Her fingers touched his treasure gingerly. Her eyes were close, peering. Her voice said, "Good heavens! A fish head!" There was a pause during which Shah's round eyes looked up at Her happily, glistening with pride.

"So that was it!" She said at last. And She laughed—an odd, quavering little laugh. Shah was lifted suddenly and held close under Her chin, and together they went away, out of the blinding light, to the warm shelter of the kitchen.

The fish head was buried in the hollow of Her neck—safe at last.

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

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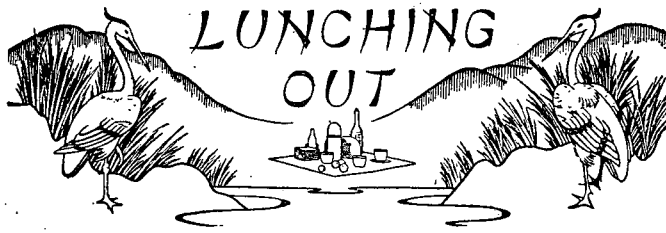

A book of verses underneath the Bough,
A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou . . .

OMAR KHAYYAM, *Rubaiyat*

It was hot enough now to make us seek the shade. On a sheep-cropped knoll under a clump of elms we ate the strawberries and drank the wine—as Sebastian had promised, they were delicious together—and we lit fat, Turkish cigarettes and lay on our backs, Sebastian's eyes on the leaves above him, mine on his profile, while the blue-grey smoke rose, untroubled by any wind, to the blue-green shadows of foliage, and the sweet scent of the tobacco merged with the sweet summer scents around us and the fumes of the sweet, golden wine seemed to lift us a finger's breadth above the turf and hold us suspended.

" Just the place to bury a crock of gold," said Sebastian. " I should like to bury something precious in every place where I've been happy and then, when I was old and ugly and miserable, I could come back and dig it up and remember."

EVELYN WAUGH, *Brideshead Revisited*

Cheese and Lilies

There's even garlands for you, violet wreaths and saffron,
And golden melilot twining with crimson roses,
And lilies plucked where they grow by the virgin river,
—Achelois brings them in green willow baskets—
And little cheeses for you that they dry in baskets of rushes,
And plums that ripen in the autumn weather,
And chestnuts, and the cheerful red of apples.
In brief, here's Ceres, Love, and rowdy Bacchus.

HELEN WADDELL, *Dancing Girl of Syria*

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Kisses and Cream

Where be ye going, you Devon Maid?
And what have ye there in the Basket?
Ye tight little fairy just fresh from the dairy,
Will ye give me some cream if I ask it?
I'll put your Basket all safe in a nook,
Your shawl I hang up on the willow,
And we will sigh in the daisy's eye
And kiss on a grass-green pillow.

JOHN KEATS

Nursery Tea

Tea on the sands was a complicated and uncomfortable business. One's bread kept falling into the sand. There might be a vigorous game of cricket or " hot rice " going on all around us, with badly-aimed balls falling on our heads or into the hot-water jug. Naughty children would throw sand, or run past us, churning up the loose sand so that it fell in our laps and brown-sugared our tea. Or a wild wet dog would dash up, impetuous and friendly, jump on the flat mound of sand that we had built for a table, and give himself a good shake all over the sandwiches. And there was nothing so irretrievable as a fresh-baked, buttered scone dropped in the sand. But in spite of these vicissitudes, a picnic on the crowded beach was an enjoyable and exciting meal: the tea and the food tasted quite different . . .

JAMES KIRKUP, *The Only Child*

Anana Split

Oh, stretched amid these orchards of the sun
Give me to drain the cocoa's milky bowl . . .
Nor, on its slender twigs
Low-bending, be the full pomegranate scorned;
Nor, creeping through the woods, the gelid race
Of berries. Oft in humble station dwells
Unboastful worth, above fastidious pomp.
Witness, thou best anana, thou the pride
Of vegetable life, beyond whate'er
The poets imaged in the golden age:
Quick let me strip thee of thy tufty coat,
Spread thy ambrosial stores, and feast with Jove!

JAMES THOMSON, *Summer*

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Dinner in the Woods

When there was no time to prepare a regular dinner, which often happened, she would give us a large piece of cold pie, or a thick slice of bread and cheese, and this we carried away with us to the wood, where we each chose the spot we liked best, and dined sumptuously.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË, *Jane Eyre*

Love in the Sun

Here the young lover, on his elbow raised,
Looked at his happy girl with grass surrounded,
And flicked the spotted beetle from her wrist:
She with her head thrown back, at heaven gazed,
At Suffolk clouds, serene and slow and mounded;
Then calmly smiled at him before they kissed.

FRANCES CORNFORD, *The Corner of the Field*

Flies in the Ointment

To take away the Stinging of Nettles . . . where there is Dock nearby, apply of this a bruised leaf to the area of stinging and chant the following Cantrap:

Out Nettle, in Dock
Dock shall have a new smock.

FRANCIS AND VERA MEYNELL, *The Week-End Book*

A Cup at Parting

If the sun's excessive heat should our bodies sulter,
To some house or hedge retreat for some friendly shelter,
But if we spy a shower nigh, or the day uncertain,
Then we flee beneath a tree, there we eat our victuals sweet,
Take a coke, smoke and soak, then again to the same,
So delightful all the way, thus do we conclude the day
With a cup at parting.

The Jolly Angler

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MIRAGE

Lost in wonder, he stared across the sun-washed wilderness

BY CLIFFORD SIMAK

THEY came out of the Martian night, six pitiful little creatures looking for a seventh.

They stopped at the edge of the camp-fire's glowing circle and stood there, staring with their owlish eyes at the three Earthmen. The Earthmen froze at whatever they were doing.

"Quiet," said Wampus Smith, talking out of the corner of his bearded lips. "They'll come in if we don't move."

From far away came a faint, low moaning, floating in across the wilderness of sand and jagged pinnacles of desert rock.

The six stood just at the firelight's edge. The reflection of the flames touched their fur with highlights of red and blue and their bodies seemed to shimmer against the backdrop of the darkness.

"Venerables," Nelson said to Richard Webb across the fire.

Webb's breath caught in his throat. Here was a thing he had never hoped to see. A thing that no human being could ever hope to see—six of the Venerables of Mars walking in out of the desert and the darkness, standing in the firelight. There were many men, he knew, who would claim that the race was now extinct, hunted down, trapped out, hounded to extinction by the greed of the human sand-men.

The six had seemed the same at first, six beings without a difference; but now, as Webb looked at them, he saw those minor points of bodily variation which marked each one of them as a separate individual. Six of them, Webb thought, and there should be seven.

Slowly they came forward, walking deeper into the camp-fire's circle. One by one they sat down on the sand facing the three men. No one said a word and the tension built up in the circle of the fire, while far towards the north the thing kept up its keening, like a sharp, thin knife-blade cutting through the night.

"Human glad," Wampus Smith said finally, talking in the patois of the desert. "He waited long."

One of the creatures spoke, its words half English, half Martian, all of it pure gibberish to the ear that did not know.

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"We die," it said. "Human kill for long. Human help some now. Now we die, human help?"

"Human sad," said Wampus, and even while he tried to make his voice sad there was elation in it, a trembling eagerness, a quivering as a hound will quiver when the scent is hot.

"We are six," the creature said. "Six not enough. We need another one. We do not find the Seven, we die. Race die for ever now."

"Not for ever," Smith told them.

The Venerable insisted. "For ever. There other Sixes. No other Seven."

"How can human help?"

"Human know. Human have Seven somewhere?"

Wampus shook his head. "Where we have Seven?"

"In cage. On Earth. For human to see."

Wampus shook his head again. "No Seven on Earth."

"There was one," Webb said softly. "In a zoo."

"Zoo," said the creature, tonguing the unfamiliar word. "We mean that. In cage."

"It died," said Webb. "Many years ago."

"Human have one," the creature insisted. "Here on planet. Hid out. To trade."

"No understand," said Wampus, but Webb knew from the way he said it that he understood.

"Find Seven. Do not kill it. Hide it. Knowing we come. Knowing we pay."

"Pay?"

"City," said the creature. "Old city."

"That's your city," Nelson said to Webb. "The ruins you are seeking."

"Too bad we haven't got a Seven," Wampus said. "We could hand it over and they'd lead us to the ruins."

"Human hurt for long," the creature said. "Human kill all Sevens. Have good fur. Women human wear it. High pay for Seven fur."

"Fifty thousand for one at the trading post," said Nelson. "A cool half-million for a four-skin cape."

Webb sickened at the thought of it, at the casual way in which Nelson mentioned it. It was illegal now, of course, but the law had come too late to save the Venerables.

"No Seven hid," Wampus was saying. "Law says friends."

"Law far off," said the creature. "Human their own law."

"Not us," said Wampus. "We don't monkey with the law."

"You help?" asked the creature.

"Try, maybe," Wampus told them cagily.

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"You find Seven. We show city," the creature said.

"We watch," said Wampus. "See Seven, bring it. Where you be?"

"Cavern mouth."

"Good," said Wampus.

Slowly the six of them got to their feet and turned back to the night again. At the edge of the firelit circle they stopped. The spokesman turned back to the three men.

"Bye," he said.

Then they were gone, back into the desert.

The three men sat and listened for a long time, not knowing what they listened for, but with ears taut to hear the slightest sound, trying to read out of sound some of the movement of life that surged all round the fire.

On Mars, thought Webb, one always listens. That is the survival price. To watch and listen and be still. To be ruthless, too. To strike before another thing can strike.

Finally Nelson took up again the thing he had been doing when the six arrived, whetting his belt knife to a razor sharpness on a pocket whetstone.

The soft, sleek whir of metal travelling over stone sounded like a heartbeat, a pulse that did not originate within the firelit circle, but something that came out of the darkness, the pulse and beat of the wilderness itself.

"It's too bad that we don't know where to pick up a Seven. Might turn a good deal," Wampus said. "Likely to be treasure in that old city. All the stories say so."

Nelson grunted. "Just stories."

"Stones," said Wampus. "Stones so bright and polished they could put your eyes out. Sacks of them. Tire a man out just packing them away."

"Wouldn't need more than one load," Nelson declared. "Just one load would set you up for life."

Webb saw that both of them were looking at him, narrowing their eyes against the firelight. He said, almost angrily, "I don't know about the treasure."

"You heard the stories," Wampus said.

Webb nodded. "Let's put it this way: I'm not interested in the treasure. I don't expect to find any."

"Wouldn't mind if you did, would you?" Nelson asked.

"It doesn't matter," Webb told him. "One way or the other."

"What do you know about this city?" Wampus demanded.

For a moment Webb stared at the man. Then he spoke slowly.

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" Just this. I figured out where it might be. From a knowledge of geography and geology and some understanding of the rise of cultures, I worked out where the grass and wood and water would have been when Mars was new and young. I tried to locate, theoretically, the likeliest place for a civilization to grow up. That's all there is to it."

Wampus spat. " You aren't even sure there is a city," he said disgustedly.

" Not until just now," said Webb. " Now I know there is."

Wampus grunted and was silent. Webb watched the two across the camp-fire from him.

They think I'm soft, he thought. They despise me because I'm soft. They would leave me in a minute if it served their purpose or they'd put a knife into me without a second thought if there was something I had that they wanted.

There had been no choice, he realized. He could not have gone alone into this wilderness, for if he'd tried he probably wouldn't have lived beyond the second day. It took special knowledge to live here and a special technique and a certain kind of mind. A man had to develop a high survival factor to walk into Mars beyond the settlements. And the settlements were now very far away. Somewhere to the east.

" Tomorrow," Wampus said, " we change directions. We go north instead of west."

Webb said nothing. His hand slid around cautiously and touched the gun at his belt, to make sure that it was there.

It had been a mistake to hire these two, he knew. But probably none of the others would have been better. They were all of a breed, a toughened, vicious band of men who roamed the wilderness, hunting, trapping, mining, taking what they found. Wampus and Nelson had been the only two at the post when he had arrived. All the other sand-men had gone a week before, back to their hunting-grounds.

At first they had been respectful, almost fawning. But as the days went on they felt surer of their ground and had grown insolent. He had supplied them with the trappings they needed to get back into the wilderness. Now he was a burden.

" I said," declared Wampus, " that tomorrow we go north."

Webb still said nothing.

" You heard me, didn't you? " asked Wampus.

" The first time," Webb said.

" We go north," said Wampus, " and we travel fast."

" Have you got a Seven staked out somewhere? "

Nelson snickered. " Ain't that the damnedest thing? Takes seven of them. Now with us, it just takes a man and woman."

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" I asked you," said Webb to Wampus, " if you have a Seven caged up somewhere? "

" No," said Wampus. " We just go north, that's all."

" I hired you to take me west."

Wampus snarled at him. " I thought you'd say that, Webb. I just wanted to know exactly how you felt about it."

" You want to leave me stranded here," said Webb. " You took my money and agreed to guide me. Now you have something else to do. You either have a Seven or you think you know where you can find one. And if I knew and talked, you would be in danger. So there's only one of two things that you can do with me. You can kill me or you can leave me and let something else do the job for you."

" We're giving you a choice, ain't we? "

He could go for his gun, of course. He could get one of them, most likely, before the other one got him.

But there would be nothing gained. He would be just as dead as if they shot him out of hand. As far as that went he was as good as dead anyhow, for hundreds of miles stretched between him and the settlements.

" We're moving out right now," said Wampus. " Ain't smart to travel in the dark, but it's not the first time that we've had to do it. We'll be up north in a day or two."

Webb said nothing, did not move. He sat on the ground, relaxed. And that, he told himself, was the thing that scared him. That he could sit and know what was about to happen and be so unconcerned about it.

Perhaps it had been the miles of wilderness that made it possible, the harsh, raw land and the vicious life that moved across the land—the ever-hungering, ever-hunting life that prowled and stalked and killed. Here life was stripped to its essentials and one learnt that the line between life and death was thin.

" Well," said Wampus finally, " what will it be, Webb? "

" I think," said Webb gravely, " I think I'll take my chance on living."

Nelson clucked his tongue against his teeth. " Too bad," he said. " We hoped it'd be the other way round. Then we could take all the stuff. As it is, we've got to leave you some."

" You can always creep back," said Webb, " and shoot me as I sit here. It would be an easy thing."

" That," said Wampus, " is not a bad idea."

Nelson said, " Give me your gun, Webb. I'll throw it back to you when we leave. But we're not taking a chance of you plugging us while we're getting ready."

Webb lifted his gun out of its holster and handed it over.

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Still sitting where he was, he watched them pack and stow the supplies into the wilderness wagon. Finally it was done.

"We're leaving you plenty to last," Wampus told him. "More than enough."

"Probably," said Webb. "You reckon I can't last very long."

"If it was me," said Wampus, "I'd take it quick and easy."

Webb sat for a long time, listening to the wagon until it was out of hearing, then waiting for the gun blast that would send him toppling face forward into the flaming camp-fire.

But finally he knew that it would not come. He piled more fuel on the fire and crawled into his sleeping-bag.

In the morning he headed east, following back along yesterday's tracks of the wilderness wagon. They'd guide him for a week or so, but finally they would disappear, brushed out by drifting sand and by the action of the weak and whining wind that sometimes blew across the bleakness of the wilderness.

At least while he followed them he would know he was going in the right direction.

He walked with the gun hanging in his hand, watching on every side, stopping at the top of the ridges to study the terrain in front of him before he moved down into it.

The unaccustomed pack which he had fashioned inexpertly out of his sleeping-bag grew heavier as the day progressed and chafed his shoulders raw. The sun was warm, as warm as the night would be cold, and thirst mounted in his throat to choke him. Carefully he doled out sips of water from the scanty supply the two had left him. He knew he would not get back. Somewhere between where he stood and the settlements he would die from lack of water.

He saw a crouching beast camouflaged against the sand, where it was waiting for him, and shot it where it lay. Later in the day, when another monstrosity came tearing out from behind a rock outcrop, his bullet caught it between the eyes before it had covered half the distance.

For an hour he squatted, unmoving on the sand while a huge insect that looked like a bumble-bee, but wasn't, hunted for the thing it had sighted only a moment before. But since it could recognize a thing by movement only, it finally gave up and went away. These times he avoided death, but he knew that the hour would come when he would not see a danger, or, having seen it, would not move fast enough to stop it.

The mirages came to haunt him, to steal his eyes from the things that he should be watching. Mirages that flickered in the

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sky, with their feet upon the ground. Tantalizing pictures of things that could not be on Mars, of places that might have been there at one time—but that very long ago.

Mirages of broad, slow rivers with the slant of sail upon them. Mirages of green forests that stretched across the hills, so clear, so close, that one could see the little clumps of wild flowers that grew among the trees. And in some of them the hint of snow-capped mountains, in a world that knew no mountains.

He kept a watch for fuel as he went along, hoping to find a cache of " embalmed " wood cropping out of the sand—wood that had escaped the ravages of time and now lay like the dried mummies of trees in the aridness of the desert.

But there was none to be found and he could not spend a night in the open without a fire.

He must find shelter in one of the many caves of the weird rock formations that sprang out of the desert. Clean out whatever might be in it, block its entrance with stones and boulders, and sleep, gun in hand.

The sun was less than an hour high when he finally spotted a cave that would serve the purpose, located on a ledge of stone jutting out of a steep hill.

From the bottom he stood for long minutes surveying the hill. Nothing moved. There were no telltale flecks of colour.

Slowly he started up, digging his feet into the shifting scree of the slope, fighting his way up foot by foot, stopping to regain his breath and to survey the slope ahead. Gaining the ledge, he moved cautiously towards the cave, gun levelled, for there was no telling what might come out of it.

He debated on his next move. Flash his light inside to see what was there? Or simply thrust his gun into the opening and spray the inside with its lethal charge? There could be no squeamishness, he told himself. Better to kill than to run the chance of danger.

He heard no sound until the claws of the thing were scrabbling on the ledge behind him. He shot one quick glance over his shoulder and saw the beast almost on top of him, got the impression of gaping mouth and murderous fangs and tiny eyes that glinted with a stony cruelty.

There was no time to turn and fire. There was time for just one thing.

His legs moved like driving pistons, hurling his body at the cave. The stone lip caught his shoulder and ripped through his clothing, gashing his arm, but he was through, through and rolling free. Something brushed his face and he rolled over something that protested in a squeaking voice.

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Off in one corner there was a thing that mewed quietly to itself.

On his knees, Webb swung his gun around to face the opening of the cave, saw the great bulk of the beast that had charged him trying to squeeze inside.

It backed away and then a great paw came in, feeling this way and that, hunting for the food that crouched inside the cave.

Mouths jabbered at Webb, a dozen voices speaking the lingo of the desert, and he heard them say, "Human, human, kill, kill."

Webb's gun spat and the paw went limp and was pulled slowly from the cave. The great grey body toppled and they heard it strike the slope below the ledge and go slithering away down the talus slope.

"Thanks, human," said the voices. "Thanks, human."

Slowly Webb sat down, cradling the gun in his lap.

All around him he heard the stir of life. Sweat broke out on his forehead and he felt moisture running from his armpits down his sides. What was in the cave? What was in here with him?

That they had talked to him didn't mean a thing. Half the so-called animals of Mars could talk the desert lingo—a vocabulary of a few hundred words, part Earthian, part Martian.

For here on Mars many of the animals were not animals at all, but degenerating forms of life that at one time must have formed a complex civilization. The Venerables, who still retained some of the shape of bipeds, would have reached the highest culture, but there must have been many varying degrees of culture, living by compromise or by tolerance.

"Safe," a voice told him. "Trust cave law."

"Cave law?"

"Kill in cave, no. Kill outside cave, yes. Safe in cave."

"I no kill," said Webb. "Cave law good."

"Good," the voice told him. "All safe now."

Webb relaxed. He slipped his gun into his holster and took off his pack, laid it down alongside, and rubbed his raw and blistered shoulders.

A voice said, "Come light, human kill."

"This human never kill," said Webb. "This human friend."

"Friend?" one of them asked. "We not know friend. Explain friend."

Webb didn't try. There was no use, he knew. They could not understand. The word was foreign to this wilderness.

At last he asked, "Rocks here?"

One of the voices answered, "Rocks in cave. Human want rocks?"

"Pile up in cave mouth," said Webb. "No killer get in."

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They digested that for a while. Finally one of them spoke up. "Rock good."

They brought rocks and stones and, with Webb helping them, wedged the cave mouth tight. It was too dark to see the things, but they brushed against him as they worked, and some of them were soft and furry and others had hides like crocodiles that tore his skin as he brushed against them. And there was one that was soft and pulpy.

He settled down in one corner of the cave, with his sleeping-bag between his body and the wall. He would have liked to crawl into it, but that would have meant unpacking, and if he unpacked his supplies he knew there'd be none come morning.

Perhaps, he reasoned, the body heat of all the things in here would keep the cave from getting too cold. Cold, yes, but not too cold for human life. It was, he knew, a gamble at best.

There was something here on Mars that fascinated him. A mystery and a loneliness, an emptiness and a retrogression that haunted him and finally sent him out to try to pierce some of that mystery, to try to discover the reason for that retrogression, to measure the greatness of the culture that in some far dim period had come tumbling down.

There had been some great work done along that line. Axelson, with his scholarly investigation of the symbolic water jugs, and Mason's sometimes fumbling attempt to trace the great migrations. Then there was Smith, who had travelled the barren world for years jotting down the wind-blown stories whispered about an ancient greatness and a golden past. Myths, most of them, of course, but somewhere lay the answer to the origin of the myths.

So it was, so it must be with the myth that told about the great and glowing city that had stood above all other things of Mars—a city that was known to the far ends of the planet.

A place of culture, Webb told himself, a place where all the achievements and all the dreams and every aspiration of the once-great planet would have come together.

And yet in more than a hundred years of hunting and of digging, Earth's archaeologists had found no trace of any city, let alone that city of all cities.

But Webb was convinced that this myth could not lie, for it was told too often at too many different places.

Mars fascinated me, he thought, and it still fascinates me, but now it may bring me death, for there is death in its fascination. Death even in this cave, for they may kill me at first light to prevent my killing them; they may keep their truce just long enough to make an end of me.

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He laid his head back against the rock and closed his eyes and thought, if they kill me, they kill me, but I will not kill them. For there has been too much human killing on the planet Mars.

He remembered himself creeping along the ledge outside the cave, debating whether he should have a look first or stick in the muzzle of his gun and sweep the cave as a simple way of being sure there would be nothing there to harm him.

I did not know, he said. I did not know.

A soft furry body brushed against him and a voice spoke to him. "Friend means no hurt? Friend means no kill?"

"No hurt," said Webb. "No kill."

"You saw six?" the voice asked.

Webb jerked from the wall and sat very still.

"You saw six?" The voice was insistent.

"I saw six," said Webb.

"When?"

"One sun."

"Where six?"

"Cavern mouth," said Webb.

"You hunt Seven?"

"No," said Webb. "I go home."

"Other humans?"

"They north," said Webb. "They hunt Seven north."

"They kill Seven?"

"Catch Seven," said Webb. "Take Seven to six. See city."

"Six promise?"

"Six promise," said Webb.

"You good human. You no kill Seven."

"No kill," insisted Webb.

"You good friend of Seven?"

"Good friend of all," said Webb.

"I Seven," said the voice.

Webb sat quietly and let the numbness clear out of his brain.

"Seven," he finally said. "You go to cavern mouth. Find six. They wait. Human friend glad."

"Human friend want city," said the creature. "Seven friend to human. Human see city. Six promise."

Webb almost laughed aloud in bitterness. Here, at last, the chance that he had hoped might come. Here, at last, the thing that he had wanted, the thing he had come to Mars to do. And he could not do it. He simply couldn't do it. "Human not go," he said. "No food. No water. Human die."

"We care for human," Seven told him. "Friend human come. We care for it."

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Webb was silent for a while, thinking. Then he asked, "You give human food? You find water?"

"Take care," said Seven.

"How Seven know I saw six?"

"Human tell. Human think. Seven know."

So that was it—telepathy. Some vestige of a former power, some attribute of a magnificent culture, not quite forgotten yet. How many of the other creatures in this cave would have it, too?

"Human go with Seven?" Seven asked.

"Human go," said Webb.

He might as well, he told himself. Going east, back towards the settlements, was no solution to his problem. He knew he'd never reach the settlements. His food would run out. His water would run out. He hadn't a chance.

Going with the little creature that stood beside him in the darkness of the cave, he might have a chance, perhaps. There would be food and water. There would be another to help him watch for the sudden death that roamed the wilderness, to warn him, to help him recognize the danger.

"Human cold," said Seven.

"Cold," admitted Webb.

"One cold," said Seven. "Two warm."

The furry thing crawled into his arms, put its arms around his body. After a moment he put his arms around it.

"Sleep," said Seven. "Warm. Sleep."

Webb ate the last of his food, and the seven Venerables told him, "We care."

"Human die," Webb insisted. "No food. Human die."

"We take care," the seven little creatures told him, standing in a row. "Later we take care."

He took it to mean that there was no food for him now, but later there would be. They took up the march again.

It was an interminable thing, that march. A thing to make a man cry out in his sleep. A thing to shiver over when they had been lucky enough to find wood and sat hunched round the fire. Day after endless day of sand and rock, of crawling up to a high ridge and plunging down the other side, of slogging through the heat across the level land that had been sea bottom in the days long gone.

It became a song, a drum-beat, a three-note marching cadence that rang through the human's head, an endless thing that hammered in his brain through the day and stayed with him hours after they had stopped for the night. Until he was dizzy with it, until his brain was drugged with the hammer of it, so that his

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eyes refused to focus when he had to use his gun against the crawling things and charging things and flying things that came at them out of nowhere.

Always there were the mirages, the everlasting mirages of Mars that seemed to lie just beneath the surface of reality. Flickering pictures painted in the sky, the water, and the trees, and the long green sweep of grass that Mars had not known for countless centuries. As if, Webb told himself, the past were very close behind them, as if the past might still exist and were trying to catch up, reluctant to be left behind in the march of time.

He lost count of the days and steeled himself against the speculation of how much longer it might be, until it seemed that it would go on for ever, that they would never stop, that they would face every morning the barren wilderness they must stagger through until the fall of night.

He drank the last of the water and reminded them he could not live without it.

"Later," they told him. "Water later."

That day they came to the city, and there, deep in a tunnel far beneath the topmost ruins, there was water, water dripping, drop by slow and tantalizing drop, from a broken pipe. Dripping water, and that was a wondrous thing on Mars.

The seven drank sparingly. They had adapted themselves to this and it was no hardship for them. But Webb lay for hours beside the broken pipe, holding cupped hands to collect a little before he lapped it, lying there in the blessed coolness.

He slept and woke and drank again, and he was rested and no longer thirsty, but his body cried for food. And there was no food nor anyone to get him food. For the little ones were gone.

They will come back, he said. They are gone for just a little while and will be back again. They have gone to get me food and they will bring it to me.

And he thought very kindly of them.

He picked his way upward through the tunnel down which they'd come. At last he came to the ruins that lay on the hill.

There wasn't much that one could see of the ruined city. It would have been entirely possible to walk past the hill and not know the city was there. During thousands of years it had crumbled and fallen in upon itself and some of it had dissolved to dust, and the sand had crept in and covered it and sifted among its fragments until it was simply a part of the hill.

Here and there Webb found broken fragments of chiselled masonry and here and there a shard of pottery, but a man could have walked past these if he had not been looking, and taken

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them for no more than another rock scattered among the trillions of fragmentary rocks littered on the surface of the planet.

The tunnel, he found, led down into the bowels of the fallen city, into the burial mound of the fallen greatness and the vanished glory of a proud people whose descendants now scuttled animal-like in the ancient deserts.

In the tunnel Webb found evidence of solid blocks of carven stone, broken columns, paving blocks, and something that seemed at one time to have been a beautifully executed statue. At the end of the tunnel he cupped his hands at the pipe and drank again, then went back to the surface and sat on the ground beside the tunnel-mouth and stared out across the emptiness of Mars.

It would take power and tools and many men to uncover and sift the evidence of the city. It would take years of painstaking, scholarly work—and he hadn't even a shovel. And worst of all, no time. For if the seven did not show up with food he would go down into the darkness of the tunnel and there eventually join his human dust with the ancient dust of this alien world.

He remembered there had been a shovel. Wampus and Nelson, when they had deserted him, had left it for him. A rare consideration, surely, he told himself. But of the supplies that he had carried away from the camp-fire that long-ago morning there were just two things left, his sleeping-bag and the pistol in his belt. All else he could get along without, those two were things that he must have.

An archaeologist, he thought. An archaeologist on the verge of perhaps the most important find that any archaeologist had ever made and unable to do anything about it.

And yet there was some certain knowledge gained along the way. The knowledge that the seven types of the Venerables did in fact still exist, that the race might continue, despite the guns and snares and the greed and guile of Earthmen.

Seven little creatures, seven different sexes. All of them essential to the continuance of the race. Six little creatures looking for the seventh, and he had found the seventh. Because he had found the seventh, because he had been the messenger, there would be at least one new generation of the Venerables to carry on the race.

What use, he thought, to carry on a race that had failed its purpose?

He shook his head.

You can't play God, he said. You can't presume to judge.

And there was another knowledge—the knowledge of the endless wastes and the savage loneliness that was the Martian wilderness.

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The knowledge of that and the queer, almost non-human detachment that it fused into the human soul.

Lessons, he thought. The lesson that one man is an insignificant speck crawling across the face of eternity. The lesson that one life is a relatively unimportant thing when it stands face to face with the overriding reality of the miracle of all creation.

He got up and stood at his full height and knew his insignificance and his humility in the empty sweep of land that fell away on every side and in the arching sky that vaulted from horizon to horizon and in the utter silence that lay upon the land and sky.

Starving was a lonely and an awful business. Some deaths are swift and clean. But starving is not one of these.

The seven did not come. Webb waited for them, and because he still felt kindly towards them he found excuses for them. They did not realize, he told himself, how short a time a man may go without nourishment. So he starved with kindly thoughts and with a great deal more patience than a man in dissimilar circumstances might be expected to do.

And he found, even when he felt the lassitude of undernourishment creeping along his muscles and his bones, even when the sharp pangs of hunger had settled to a gnawing horror that never left him, even when he slept, that his mind was not affected by the ravages that his body was undergoing; that his brain, apparently, was sharpened by the lack of food, that it seemed to step aside from his tortured body and become a separate entity that was scarcely aware of external factors.

He sat for long hours upon a polished rock, perhaps part of that once-proud city, just a few yards from the tunnel mouth, and stared out across the sun-washed wilderness that stretched for miles towards a horizon that it never seemed to reach. He sought to evolve out of the random factors that moved beneath the surface of the universe's orderliness some evidence of a pattern that would be understandable to the human mind. Often he thought he had it, but it always slid away from him like quicksilver escaping from a clutching hand.

At first he had tried to hunt animals for food, but strangely, while the rest of the wilderness swarmed with vicious life that hunted timid life, the area round the city was virtually deserted, as if someone had drawn a sacred chalk mark round it. On his second day of hunting he killed a small thing that on Earth could have been a mouse. He built a fire and cooked it and later hunted up the sun-dried skin and sucked and chewed at it for the small nourishment that it might contain. But after that there was nothing to be killed.

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Finally he came to know the seven would not come, that they never had intended to come, that they had deserted him exactly as his two human companions had deserted him before. He had been made a fool of, not once, but twice. He should have kept on going east after he had started. He should not have come back with Seven to find the other six who waited at the cavern's mouth.

You might have made it to the settlements, he told himself. You just might have made it.

East. East towards the settlements.

Human history is a trying—a trying for the impossible—and attaining it.

Try, said Webb, not knowing exactly what he said.

He walked down the hill again and started out across the wilderness, heading towards the east. For there was no hope upon the hill and there was hope towards the east.

A mile from the base of the hill he fell. He staggered, falling and rising, for another mile. He crawled a hundred yards. It was there that the seven found him.

"Food!" he cried at them.

He had a feeling that although he cried it in his mind there was no sound in his mouth.

"Food! Water!"

"We take care," they said, and lifted him, holding him in a sitting position.

"Life," Seven told him, "is in many husks. Like nested boxes that fit inside each other. You live one and you peel it off and there's another life."

"Wrong," said Webb. "You do not talk like that. Your thought does not flow like that. There is something wrong."

"There is an inner man," said Seven. "There are many inner men."

"The subconscious," said Webb, and while he said it in his mind he knew that no word, no sound came out of his mouth. And he knew now, too, that no words were coming out of Seven's mouth. Here were words that could not be expressed in the patois of the desert; here were thoughts and knowledge that could not belong to a thing that scuttled, fearsome, through the Martian wilderness.

"You peel an old life off and you step forth in a new and shining life," said Seven, "but you must know the way. There is a certain technique and a certain preparation. If there is no preparation and no technique the job is often bungled."

"Preparation," said Webb. "I have no preparation. I do not know about this"

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"You are prepared," said Seven. "You were not before, but now you are."

"I thought," said Webb.

"You thought," said Seven, "and you found a partial answer. Well-fed, earth-bound, arrogant, there would have been no answer. You found humility."

"I do not know the technique," said Webb. "I do not . . ."

"We know the technique," Seven said. "We take care."

The hilltop shimmered where the dead city lay, and there was a mirage on it. Out of the dead mound of its dust rose the pinnacles and spires, the buttresses and the flying bridges of a city that shone with colour and with light; out of the sand came the blaze of garden beds of flowers and the tall avenues of trees and a music that came from the slender bell-towers.

There was grass beneath his feet instead of sand blazing with the heat of the Martian noon. There was a path that led up the terraces of the hill towards the wonder city that reared upon its heights. There was the distant sound of laughter and there were flecks of colour moving on the distant streets and along the walls and garden paths.

Webb swung round and the seven were not there. Nor was the wilderness. The land stretched away on every side and it was not wilderness, but a breathtaking place with groves of trees and roads and flowing watercourses.

He turned back to the city again and watched the movements of the flecks of colour.

"People," he said.

And Seven's voice, coming to him from somewhere, from elsewhere, said, "People from the many planets. And from beyond the planets. And some of your own people you will find among them. For you are not the first."

Filled with wonder, a wonder that was fading, that would be entirely faded before he reached the city, Webb started walking up the path.

Wampus Smith and Lars Nelson came to the hill many days late. They came on foot because the wilderness wagon had broken down. They came without food except the little food they could kill along the way; and they came with no more than a few drops of water sloshing in their cans—and there was no water to be found.

There, a short distance from the foot of the hill, they found the sun-dried mummy of a man face downward on the sand, and when they turned him over they saw who he was.

Wampus stared across the body at Nelson.

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"How did he get here?" he croaked.

"I don't know," said Nelson. "He never could have made it. And he wouldn't have travelled this way anyhow. He would have headed east, back to the settlements."

They pawed through his clothing and found nothing. But they took his gun.

"What's the use?" said Nelson. "We can't make it."

"We can try," said Wampus.

Above the hill a mirage flickered—a city with shining turrets and dizzy pinnacles and rows of trees and fountains that flashed with leaping water. To their ears came, or seemed to come, the sound of many bells.

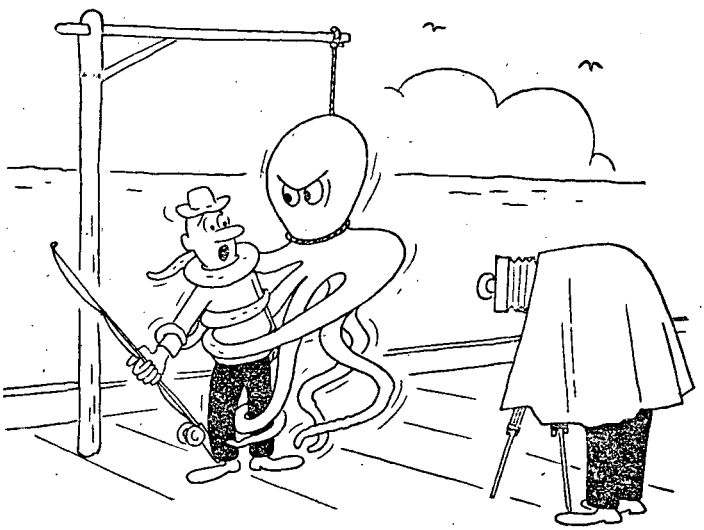
Wampus spat with lips that were cracked and dried, spat with no saliva in his mouth.

"Them damn mirages," he said. "They drive a man half crazy."

"They seem so close," said Nelson. "They are so close and real. As if they were somewhere else and were trying to break through."

Wampus spat again. "Let's get going," he said.

The two men turned towards the east and, as they moved, they left staggering, uneven tracks through the sand of Mars.



"Hey, hurry up there, will you?"

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Two Voices—

Her mouth is fragrant as a vine,
A vine with birds in all its boughs,
Serpent and scarab for a sign
Between the beauty of her brows
And the amorous deep lids divine.

Her great curled hair makes luminous
Her cheeks, her lifted throat and chin
Shall she not have the hearts of us
To shatter, and the loves therein
To shred between her fingers thus?

Small ruined broken strays of light,
Pearl after pearl she shreds them through
Her long sweet sleepy fingers, white
As any pearl's heart veined blue,
And soft as dew on a soft night.

A. C. SWINBURNE, *Cleopatra*

—of Love

The conifers black through the chromium moon
Like conical reamers bite
And the river beneath the old tow-path
Is a fluorescent white.

Oh! here I wait for my love, my sweet,
And dream of her features fair;
Of her gentian eyes, her eosin cheeks,
And her aureomycin hair.

My heart like a jet-plane rushes up
At the sound of her wedgies dear,
My pulse like a geiger-counter throbs
When uranium is near.

Come to the closed-chain of my arms
Kiss me my love, my hope.
My soul is the element of love
And you are its isotope.

D. DE VERE WILSON, *Should Poets Use Modern Similes?*

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MERCHANT PRINCES

You could see the bulge of bank notes and the wink of gold rings

H. A. MANHOOD

HAVE you ever been given a vanload of stuffed animals or found a church organ standing in your drive? These were the kind of gifts that came naturally from association with the tribes of Smith and Lee.

Thinking it over, it is perhaps wrong to describe the activities of this group as work; play would be much more accurate for they appeared to enjoy thoroughly the whole complicated business of dealing in junk.

For many years members of these two families met at the corner of the lane to discuss prospects and swop goods, loud and joyous as a circus act, sallow, black-haired children racing among them like twittering swallows. The meetings were curiously spaced, according to some unwritten calendar of their own, the existence of which they refused most politely to admit. In the beginning, when they used horses and a variety of traps and carts to make their rounds, and the orchard was derelict, they dumped completely valueless objects into it by the ton, stopping immediately I explained the change of ownership, wishing me the best of luck in the work of salvation.

Thereafter they looked in occasionally, offering things for nothing and for sale cheap, and buying odd lots I'd collected at auction. They were very friendly and there was little rivalry among them, except in being obliging.

When things were, apparently, in short supply, they said it was daft to go short; the stuff was there for the asking, all kinds of stuff. Just name it, brother. A hundredweight or two of sugar perhaps, petrol, tyres, a case of whisky or oranges—anything. Might cost me a little over the odds, but what harm if the heart is happy?

In return for such spontaneous goodwill I wrote cryptic letters for them, passed on extraordinary information to the most unlikely people, allowed them to park overnight, when need arose,

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in a backwater of the orchard, and advised them on small matters of law.

Sensibly, since the wives were less clannish than the men, they lived far apart in lonely, wide-open, uncurtained cottages, their many children playing among the piled junk. When the children damaged themselves strident mothers clouted them before applying the bandage. Clothes were clean but ragged, as proof of poverty.

Occasionally, as when Aaron Lee bought the entire contents of the house of an ancient recluse and wife, the male tribe went about for months in fancy-flowered waistcoats, elastic-sided boots, and cut-away coats, while the females wore splendid lace and velvet and tippets of mothy fur, feeling not in the least odd or embarrassed. Another time it was a load of theatrical stuff that lit them up, but generally the attire was sale goods and, latterly, army surplus.

Occasionally, as might be expected with such a buoyant crowd, there was near trouble with new, thrusting constables who could not believe that there wasn't a touch of crime somewhere. When the dealers became tired of questioning and having their lorries searched they took action, as in the case of Abel Smith.

He'd bought a roadside stack of cleft oak and was pulling away after taking tally when a suspicious constable raced after him on his bike, calling on him to stop. Abel did stop, so suddenly that the constable ran into the back of the lorry and broke his nose, collar-bone, and wrist. Abel kindly ran the man to hospital and looked in on the sergeant to explain.

The sergeant was grateful all round; the constable had been a nuisance from the start and it was no use telling him that the dealers weren't like some of the types in the building trade, garage hands, sale porters, lorry-drivers, and electrical maintenance men who always had something to sell, called perks. It wasn't that one or two of the dealers hadn't the inclination to pick things up, but they just couldn't afford to slip, lose goodwill and the privilege of entry into private houses.

Such petty malice and crooked opinion worried the merchant princes not at all. Life was too full of fun and profit to waste time in bitterness. Variety was particularly important to them. Minor proof of this was the rate at which they changed vehicles, bartering one for another with complete disregard for usefulness or appearances, but always with a profit in money or kind.

For a time Old Luke drove around in a majestic Lagonda that made cloud-tearing noises. Twelve miles to the gallon didn't seem to hurt his pocket at all. Then he swopped it for an Austin Seven and a tidy packet of money, sold the Austin several days

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later to two maiden ladies, walked to the village, and bought an old-fashioned hearse with engraved side windows and brass knobs all over the place like a travelling pawnshop, buying from the same stable a pile of old blackened tubing which turned out to be copper, and a box of aircraft spares, mouse-musty but nicely loaded with platinum.

Most of their deals were like that, brisk, varied, and imaginative. Always their eyes were wide and they would buy anything if only for the sake of looking round to see what else could be bought. If the seller knew no better he suffered no loss.

As for accounts and taxes: "It's all hand to mouth, brother. Look at us, bone-poor, struggling, working all the time for a crust. We keep level. We work for each other and what we have to pay we pay and collect again in benefits like all the others. It works out but it's daft. All this licking of stamps is a bad business." And they would smile in a benevolent, winking way, knowing you could see the bulge of bank notes in various pockets and the yellow shine of rings on brown fingers.

The general philosophical attitude of the group showed pleasantly in a transaction of my own. For years I possessed an ancient two-seater which looked deplorable but, being well-conditioned, ran most sweetly to the occasional glaring surprise of superior motorists. To the Smiths and the Lees the thing was like a pedigreed pony, well-boned under the grime and easily saleable when they tired of it.

Serious behind the banter, they offered to buy it many times, even bringing possible cars along for inspection in the hope of part-exchange. But I liked the little one for all its extreme shabbiness. And then, unexpectedly, came a friend's offer of something bigger and better, impossible to refuse. I thought of keeping the little car as a pensioner, but there was only garage space for one. I would sell.

Like jolly, clairvoyant hunting-dogs three Smiths and one Lee appeared in the drive the morning after the decision was made, the breakfast crumbs still clinging, all anxious to buy, not greedily for immediate profit, but just for the fun of owning the little car, if only for a while. I named a price, fifty pounds. All were willing to give it, without bargaining, but they were not foolish enough to bid higher against each other. All wanted to be fair. They grinned amiably and waited for wisdom from the senior member.

Tomsy scratched the back of his thick neck. "First man to catch a sparrow alive in the hand buys the car," he said. "Inside this place and no tricks."

I couldn't believe I'd heard right. But it was so. There were

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no complaints either so they must have done the same thing before. I didn't believe anyone could possibly do it. I imagined them wandering about the place for weeks, possibly months, hunting unsuccessfully while the little car sank on its tyres and rust crept over it. I watched them as they moved seriously about the orchard, choosing positions. One of them went into the nut grove, Tomsy stepped lightly under an enormous hanging canopy of honeysuckle, and the other two ducked into a ditch under a dense myrobalan hedge.

I sat and waited, feeling absurd, mushroomy, part of an abandoned vaudeville act. I hoped other Smiths and Lees would not come to complicate matters. Birds came and went, all kinds except sparrows.

I began to need a drink, early though it was. And then I heard a soft, triumphant whistle from the hedge and Saturday Smith stepped out. I went to look, the others too. No doubt about the sparrow in hand. Saturday kissed its neat head and let it go.

Tomsy fumbled in a pocket and produced a rather winded blackbird and an indignant robin. "Every bloody thing in the honeysuckle except sparrows," he said disgustedly.

I asked how they did it, but the reply wasn't very helpful: "You just talk to 'em, brother, like they was sweet women."

Pleased with himself, Saturday stripped off ten fivers from an untidy pack and said he'd be back for his own van within the hour and to let him have the log book then. He was giving the car to his son as a wedding present—just the job for a stretch of honeymoon.

In the weeks that followed, I wondered about the car as one might about an absent relative. I saw other Smiths but not Saturday. At last he came, carrying a cardboard case, which he put down gently as if it might be full of sparrows.

How did the car go?

"Ha, brother, the car's gone, real gone! The boy and the bride parked at a hotel in Blackpool. Bloody place burnt down one night, garage and all. Well insured too. The boy put a claim in. They've agreed to pay out two hundred quid. The boy thought you'd like a drink out of it. Dozen of Scotch but you can change it for gin if you like. Pity about the little old car, in a way. Don't want to sell the one you've got now, I suppose?"

★ ★ ★

People who live in Chateaux
Shouldn't throw tomateaux

J. B. MORTON

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★ *Not many Argosy stories are bought by radio, as this was—the author, an Assistant Keeper of the Eddystone Lighthouse, won second prize in the Seafarers' Education Service Story Competition.*

Hazards of sea and air are native to this type of job. In ***Grand Canyon,*** *A. J. Lane, a trained seaman, focuses for a few dramatic seconds on the imagined impact of an American plane crash: a daring mental gymnastic—wholly fictional, highly technical—told with an individual strength of vision as ruthlessly lonely as a wartime watch at sea. These few pages have an X certificate and are not for nervous readers.*

GRAND CANYON

BY A. J. LANE

THE last person to board the Super-Constellation at Los Angeles Airport was a Mrs. Rowena O'Neill, widow. It was her forty-second birthday. She chose a seat halfway back on the left-hand side, slightly forward of the wing and a little to the rear of the plane of the propellers; and as she sat down she was thinking that she was putting on weight, that she ought to control her unreasonable dislike of her brother's wife, that the recently completed tour of her West Coast business contacts had been most successful . . .

The well-knit system of uncomplicated prejudice and manageable anxiety that was the mind of Mrs. O'Neill was mirrored in those of the other sixty-four passengers travelling with her. The only significant deviation was in a man who two years previously had misappropriated two thousand dollars, and had since lived in daily fear of discovery. But even his fear had in course of time become a little ordinary, as one might, perhaps, get used to toothache.

So throughout, in the contacts thrust upon them by confinement in this slim, comfortable, beautifully engineered saloon, there was the expression of a practised, well-bred benevolence: expressed by people well dressed, assured, reserved, ready—and careful—to converse within their class. People observant: woman conning that business man with the actor's profile, a document

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case open on his knees—oil is his world; people considerate: mother saying "shush" to already-bored child spelling out E-M-E-R-G-E-N-C-Y from a notice above a window; people willing to be helpful—passenger having difficulty adjusting seat, man opposite smiles and points instructions: difficulty resolved, murmured thanks, but no conversation: neither wishes to presume.

An apparatus devised to make limited lives outwardly as smooth as they are inwardly well ordered. A declaration of social neutrality by people who expect to die in bed.

In fact there is five seconds' warning of impact. A passenger notices a shadow progressing oddly along the wing spread out beneath him. He leans forward, looking upwards through his window, aware of a spasm of fear before he can know that it is justified.

The other aircraft is above, slightly behind, slightly to one side, and apparently descending. This is an illusion. Both, in fact, are still climbing, but his, having initially levelled out at 17,000 feet, has since resumed a steeper climb-gradient combined with a relatively lower forward speed.

The man starts to his feet and gesticulates to a stewardess, whose attention is drawn to him by a woman in the rear of the plane—the stewardess, with a professional smile, is offering the woman's child an ice. *Two seconds gone.*

An American girl—perfectly dressed, perfectly made up, perfectly mannered—has just taken a letter from her handbag and is replacing the bag in the rack above her seat. The letter contains an offer of marriage. She has decided to say no. He's a nice boy, though not really quite—well—college. Meanwhile it is pleasant to read the letter. She stands aside to allow the stewardess to pass. *Three seconds gone.*

Professionally attentive, the stewardess reaches the man in the fourth second. He raises a finger. "Plane above." He cannot say more. His mouth is shaking.

The fifth second is on them.

The aircraft meet in the only position in which they could have remained blind to each other to the very last. First contact is tentative: the rear belly of the upper descends precisely upon the starboard fin of the lower. This ensures that the subsequent course of the emergency shall be catastrophic. The enforced depression of the tail causes the lower plane to climb sharply, and thereafter events multiply swiftly.

Briefly, the starboard propellers of the upper plane bite into the wing surfaces of the lower and penetrate the integral tanks, which rupture, releasing fuel which immediately catches fire. At

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the same time a blade from the propeller of No. 3 engine pierces the fuselage on the right side, decapitates a boy seated beside his mother, and leaves the cabin on the left. At once the body of the boy disappears through the hole in the fuselage, which the violence of his exit enlarges; similarly, on the opposite side of the aisle, the business woman, Mrs. O'Neill, is forced against, and through, the propeller's exit-hole.

Aircraft height at this instant is 21,500 feet, cabin pressure 8,000, and the explosive decompression that has occurred causes partial or complete deafness. But most passengers remain fully conscious, though distressed. Volitional movement is made difficult, physically by the varying gravitational stresses to which occupants are subjected at this time, psychologically by the inhibiting effect of extreme fear. Where, anyway, would they go?

Airspeed having fallen away rapidly from the moment of impact, due to the acute climbing attitude assumed then by both aircraft, there is an instant at which the airflow past the fuselage vents is quietened, and the roar of the fuel fire in the wing becomes clearly audible. A high proportion of passengers, particularly among the women, accept this momentary quietness as an indication that the emergency is now under control, or will shortly be so.

But almost immediately the nose of the aircraft drops, and does so with a suddenness that flings the passengers, with the exception of a few at the rear, against the roof. Some are stunned, others sustain fractures. Almost at once the fuselage is vertical and has begun its 21,000-foot plunge.

The situation then is this: all four engines are dead with the exception of No. 2, which delivers intermittent bursts of full power. The port wing is intact, the starboard wing ruptured and fiercely ablaze.

There is no rudder control. Elevators and ailerons are superficially undamaged, but cannot be operated in the prevailing confusion in the control cabin, where pilot, co-pilot, and navigator are lying against the windscreen, concussed.

The wireless operator, crushed against his transmitter, unable to switch to Mayday frequency, shouts: " Four-three-seven to Salt Lake: we are going—" and, incredibly, is heard. At that instant he had not yet acknowledged the inevitability of the end: his cry was instinctive.

At 7,000 feet and an indicated 425 knots, the starboard outer wing breaks away and the subsequent asymmetric attitude prevents any further significant build-up in speed.

The situation in the cabin becomes finalized: passengers falling forwards as terminal velocity is reached, with the exception

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of a half dozen or so who are lying against the backs of the seats. This concentration in the small area of the front-cabin bulkhead accounts perhaps for the impossibility of identifying the victims, or even, in most cases, individual bodies after the fuel-tank in the port wing, till then unignited, had been set ablaze by the impact.

The situation in the other aircraft was throughout somewhat different. Structural damage was less severe, the cabin was not penetrated, and because it was the underside of the aircraft that had made contact, many passengers remained in ignorance, up to the end, that their predicament was the result of collision.

There was time enough for a musician, on his way with his colleagues to give a series of concerts, to rise in his seat, but not enough for him to make it clear why he had done so.

A stewardess began to hurry forward, then, as the plane reared up, fell in a slithering, racking retrogression back through the saloon twenty feet into the tail.

From someone, a woman or child, a single indeterminate cry was heard.

Here, the impact of the collision broke the fuel lines to the starboard engines, causing fierce local fires in the engine bays. But these were quite overshadowed by what followed, and had no time to prove critical. In view of the turbulent air conditions the pilot of the aircraft had elected to remain strapped in his seat, and was therefore in a position to take advantage of whatever opportunities of corrective action presented themselves. The impact had wiped off the propellers of Nos. 3 and 4 engines and the subsequent plunge threw the Flight Engineer against the control pedestal, to knock all four throttles through the override to maximum.

It may have been the response of the still-undamaged port engines to this action that caused the aircraft to slew to the right and break free from the Constellation beneath. It is conceivable that sufficient control might even then have been regained to enable an attempt at a landing to be made had not the only significant damage to the starboard wing involved the control runs, resulting in permanent maximum deflection of the starboard aileron in the raised position.

This, too, would not perhaps have proved fatal had it been possible to bring the aircraft to an even keel before the airspeed built up to a point where the rudder became too heavy to be used for correction.

In the event it was not possible: the speed continued to rise and the rate of roll increased until it stabilized in an inverted spin at about 450 degrees per second. As a result there was here no

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tendency for passengers to fall forward in the cabin; centrifugal force maintained a semblance of order by holding them against the walls, until at about one thousand feet from the ground major structural break-up occurred, initiated by failure of the main spar between Nos. 3 and 4 engines. In quick succession port wing, centre and nose sections, and tail unit broke away.

With the last-named went the pressure-dome, the subsequent airblast through the cabin effecting almost complete evacuation, bodies and cabin furnishings being distributed within a radius of 250 yards from the point of main impact on the lip of the Grand Canyon, and major wreckage within a radius of one mile. There was no fire.

What of the last thoughts of these unfortunates—of the captains and their crews, of the passengers, old and young, men and women before all of whom life had so recently seemed to stretch out warmly to a genial old age in a world of kindness; all now suddenly wrenched away and replaced with a hideous prospect of violence, of burning, mutilation, and graceless, comfortless death?

Could they, in those few, long seconds as the earth howled up to meet them, have erected some thin palisade against this terrible, untimely truth? One thing is certain: sooner or later, breaching all flimsy defences, to them all must have come the moment of appalled admission:

I am here, and this is happening to me!

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to UNDER LOCK AND KEY on page 41

1. *Belinda; the Baron, reported by Alexander Pope.*
2. *"O who will o'er the downs so free?"* She *was the Blooming Bride.*
3. *Richard Cœur de Lion, incognito, in Ivanhoe.*
4. *Harry Graham.*
5. *Typewriter; old-fashioned type of gun; villains of H. G. Wells's The Time Machine; person who brought Coleridge's Kubla Khan to an untimely end.*
6. *Kitty Fisher.*
7. *Legislative Assembly of the Isle of Man.*

ARGOSY COMPETITION

We are again asking readers, as we did last summer, to list this month's stories in order of preference. Send your list on a postcard to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London E.C.4, by September 10. Two guineas will go to the list that most nearly represents popular opinion.

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All my desire was for Helen. Since the night of the storm I had known that she loved me; and I think Henry Seaman knew—and enjoyed it. It amused him to see my torture—and he did not torture me alone . . . Henry had brought Helen back from England as his bride; young, lovely, ash-blonde. He had painted the African Congo, and our cattle farm in the jungle, in romantic terms. The savage reality was a crude shock, as was her bitter discovery of Henry's sadistic temperament, and his perverted humour. She had come to hate him.

Tension mounted with the terrible events after the storm: the ghastly killing by driver ants of the imprisoned African; the menace of the murderous leopard-men who had tortured Marie-Thérèse, Henry's half-caste mistress; and, in Henry's absence, my own hairbreadth escape from savaging by the bull—all this had wrought in us a passionate climax of love and fear. Swept into a maelstrom of emotion, we had at last become lovers—to whom every moment was precious until Henry's hated return . . .

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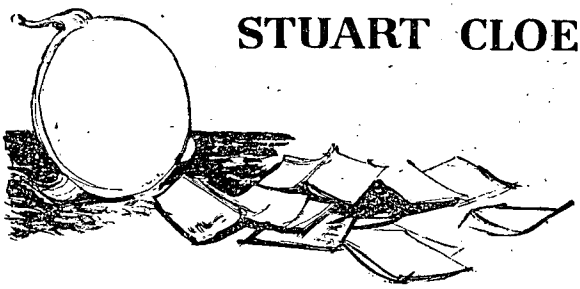
MAMBA

BY

STUART CLOETE



WHEN Henry came back I told him about the accident. All he said was that I should have been more careful, and then he asked about the bull.

Henry had changed. His humour was more savage. I do not know what the Chef de District had said to him about the death of the African but it cannot have been pleasant. He had not believed his story of the native being dead drunk and unable to get away. But the boys would have lied, concealing the gruesome details of his killing by ants, after Henry had locked him in the shed. The man's family had been bribed. Compensated, Henry called it. Even murder was not a serious offence among them as long as the dead were paid for. They would not have had him back for the twenty goats Henry had given them to hush the matter up.

Considering everything, Henry thought he'd not done too badly, and that damn Chef de District, Monsieur Bloody Fouquet, had nothing on him. Henry had sent his own written explanation of " this regrettable accident " to the Company head office: "... these tragedies, as Monsieur the managing director must realize, being himself a Colonial of much experience, were an integral part of the hard and dangerous life men had to lead in the wilder parts of the Colony ..."

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Oh yes, it had been a good letter and he was a valuable servant. No one knew more about running stock in the bush than he did.

He was in a good mood. A joking mood. He'd think of something good one of these days. Something really funny that would put Helen in her place once and for all. As for Marie-Thérèse, the sulky black bitch, to hell with her. He supposed he should have kicked her out but it appealed to him to have her here with Helen. For him, the cream of it was her being taken on by Helen as a maid. It amused him to think that he'd had them both and could again any time he felt like it.

He had no time for a man who could not laugh.

Life settled back into its old routine on the surface, but under the skin of our open lives each of us was occupied with another secret life. I was having trouble with Marie-Thérèse. She had been pleased with her cloths but her pleasure had not lasted. Under a white-toothed, smiling exterior, she was sullen. I supposed that she was jealous. I did not think she would tell Henry that Helen and I were lovers because she would get more out of me by remaining silent.

In my mind was terror and lust. One moment I was being sucked down into a whirlpool of despondency, the next being swept upwards in a dust-devil of elation. My world was at once hushed and more than life-size.

When I had taken Helen I had continued to see myself reflected in her eyes with the room behind me. This had been the ultimate moment of consummation and my mind went blank. This was what I had waited for, planned for, taken risks for, and it could not be appreciated while it went on nor remembered afterwards in its fullness.

I continued to feel her body in the tips of my fingers when we were apart, and remembered the perfection of her body with my brain. Now I knew the intolerable ache of beauty, for only thus could man possess it, and then only for an instant because his desire for beauty, for perfection, was lost in the act of an animal. So much was desired, there were so many dreams. These were not the gates of heaven, only the gates out of hell, out of the desire that sent men mad.

One day, not long after Henry's return, I had been allowed to take Helen to the high forest. She said she would like to see it and Henry offered no objection, but when we were in it, it terrified her.

It is very difficult to describe the high forest. There are no terms. The forest is a cathedral, but the terms of architecture cannot be applied to its great pillars, its variable arches, to the green lights that pierce the stained glass of its leaves, the brown carpet of rotting vegetation that is spread down its hundred aisles. The strange choir of birds and monkeys that suddenly give praise or scream in terror. The organ music of the branches in the wind.

Is it God or the devil who lives here? Or both? The forest is a place of awe, of terror. Out of it rise the emergents—this is the botanist's term for the occasional giants that dominate the lesser

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trees. The dictators of this vegetal world, which may run two hundred feet before forking into branches. Below them come the ordinary trees, flat as a table-top, matted with intertwining limbs, with lianas; jealous of each other, holding each other back till a giant falls, when they race upwards to take his place.

There were no gorillas here. There are none south of the Congo, but there were chimps, and monkeys, and birds. Grey parrots illuminated with scarlet. Big hawks; and eagles that made their platform-nests in the trees. Leopards lay at rest on the branches, sleeping with their dew-claws engaged in the bark. There were elephants, and small buck no bigger than hares, bush cow—the red forest buffalo, and snakes—looped forest pythons beautifully marked with geometric patterns, and others more ordinary-looking and more dangerous.

The forest, when it is damaged, is swift to come back. It waits for man, it pauses, and then returns. Round every tiny clearing it stands ready, poised. Its trees rise straight towards the sky, a living wall. Its borders are lashed together with ropes of lianas, decorated with blood-red flowering shrubs, with enormous leaves, with scented lilies, with the torn flags of the wild bananas.

Inside, in the depths, great trees grow and die, torn down by age and the weight of the creepers that have climbed them and, when they fall, suspend them till they disintegrate within their basket cradle. Sometimes they are not strong enough. Sometimes the monster is too big and it crashes to the ground, but often it remains standing, dying like an ancient warrior on its rotting feet.

The clearings are brilliant, shimmering with butterflies. But the day is often silent. Only at night does the forest truly wake.

The paths are tunnels through the oppressive forest, in which one can hardly stand erect. The land is seldom flat, but rolls and climbs, falling at times into deep ravines where the going is easier as the leaves and branches grow higher, seeking the distant light. Everything is wet and verdant. The patches of moss are a livid, almost yellow green. The big flat leaves of the bulbous plants are dark, shining with moisture, and appear to be varnished, like green patent leather. Fallen moss-clothed trees, eaten away by termites, fall to pieces at a touch, and swarm with bluish scorpions. There are clumps of ferns, giant palms, wild bananas, great tree buttresses coated with velvet moss on which ferns, lichens, and elephant ears have taken root. There are whole thickets of long-stemmed, broad-leaved plants. Moisture drips from everything. There are tiny rivulets running through the thick sepia-coloured humus. A water diamond trembles at the tip of every leaf.

One has the feeling of being submerged. The sky is invisible except for the twinkle of light patches that are seen through the interstices of leaves a hundred feet above one's head. The air is heavy, thick with humidity, like that of a conservatory.

But if a large portion of forest is thoroughly cleared by axe and fire it will not return. Instead grass grows, sour and coarse, and a secondary growth of inferior trees. soft-wooded parasoliers, and

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others. The noble forest has become bush, no less sinister, but without grandeur or dignity.

What terrifies one in Africa, perhaps most of all in the great forests or on such rivers as the Congo or the Zambesi, is the impossibility of exaggeration. No word, no adjective is too strong: all are understatements. For men who use words as we use them have no place here. These are places of the senses alone. Their immensity is felt in the prickling of the skin over the lost muscles that govern the roots of the hair, striving to pull it erect, to bristle. The ears attempt to cock, the eyes strain as we move like hunting-dogs on tiptoe, ready to jump forward in attack or back in fear. To try to express these feelings in words that can be understood by those who have never been here is to fail. The most I can do is to suggest.

Helen, inarticulate as she was with her inadequate suburban vocabulary, said, " It's awful." Well, it was awful. I can use no stronger word.

Parasite piles itself onto parasite. Organism on organism. This is the very womb of the world.

I remember that day in the forest very clearly. The contrast of its darkness to Helen's fair, golden beauty. The mood in which it left us both. The peculiar brilliance of the great butterflies that fluttered like jewels in the sunlight of the clearings. There were velvety black swallow-tails with electric-blue markings, others with eau-de-nil green markings. And smaller scarlet butterflies and blues and great tortoiseshells like those of Europe but magnified, their colours intensified. To watch them was an experience. To see them suck the flower nectar with long curled black watch-spring tongues. To see them mate in flight. To see them so alive and so fragile, dancing in the sunlight against a background of forest so dark that its green merged into black, into solidity.

It was a happy day of high emotion, of fear offset by love, a kind of fête champêtre. What has struck me since again and again is the strange innocence and perfection of our passion. Perhaps because we were both so young.

The high forest lay some thirty miles from the ranch. There was a road of sorts that led through it. Between the forest proper and the plains that surrounded the homestead there were patches of bush that we burnt down when we could, and little isolated islands of the original primeval growth that the natives, in their ancient war with the trees for the ground they wrested from them for their fields, had spared because they thought them sacred. We, too, fought the forest and the bush for they were the home of the tsetse, which can neither live nor breed in sunshine. And the cattle, closely herded always, were kept away from the bush. On the plains, in the open veld, there was no danger.

We had been bitten, but not badly, and anyway there was no sleeping-sickness here, only ngana, which kills cattle and horses. Man was safe enough.

Helen was very brave about being bitten and laughed at me when

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I swore. She was fortunate in having a skin which, though it was so white and fine-grained, was singularly resistant to bites and did not show scars.

She was wearing a light blue cotton dress that day. It changed the colour of her eyes. Though they were grey, they had some of the qualities of the sea and could look blue or green at times, according to what she wore or felt. They could darken with desire, and become slumbrous with enlarged pupils. They could pale into expressionlessness as if the life had been bled out of her. The eyes have been called the windows of the soul, but they are more than this. They are instruments of power, of energy. In the quick look between a man and woman when they first meet, a message is both sent and received.

Goodness, vice, love, hate . . . emotion pours out of the eyes like blood out of a wound.

Little things come back. The blue of Helen's eyes and dress. The delicacy of her sunbrowned arms. The scent of her hair. The beauty of her slim bare legs as she climbed into the truck. The sense that she, all of her, in all her perfection, had been mine for a day, and the sadness that the day was over.

We had shared a profound experience in which awe and love were blended unforgettably.

Going home, we hardly spoke. Our mood softened the harsh world of bush and grass; the sun, collaborating with us, hung low in the sky, illuminating the world with the lilac light of early evening. Birds in pairs were flying to rest. It was spring in our hearts.

Love heightens every sense. Perhaps that is why some of us seek it, while others seek drink, its opposite. In love we find much more than ordinary life can offer. Every colour is brighter, every scent more sweet, every feeling more poignant, the woman we love more beautiful. Her flesh more soft, her mouth more moist. In drink we seek oblivion—we act like children, saying, If I can't have everything, I'll have nothing.

Love is the entrance to life. We try to analyse love and then find it ends in a woman's body. Or goes beyond it into some greater mystery. Perhaps it is this greater thing that we seek. This mystery that instinctively we know only woman can solve for man. In a sense a woman is no more love than a church is God. Both are a means to some unspecified end. But only with a woman can a man proceed, his hand in hers, towards eternity. To reach it he must have her company. To reach it she must have his.

If we could have known what would happen while we were away, we should not have gone.

On our return, Henry greeted us in a most friendly manner. Asked if we had had a good time. Asked what we had seen of interest. The drinks were hospitably ready.

Then Helen called her dog.

I was surprised that he had not been there with his inarticulate howling growl of welcome when we arrived. He was a small

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yellow-and-white basenji, a native dog that Pedro da Costa had given Helen as a pup. She had named him Bunny. The basenji are interesting dogs, very courageous, wonderful hunters, but unable to bark. The coat is smooth, and very close like the feathers of a game-cock. When hunting, the natives tie a big wooden bell about their loins. They will tackle anything—gorilla in the northern forests, bush cow, even elephant, if set at them. Helen was devoted to her dog.

Henry said, "Oh, Bunny. I'm afraid I have bad news about him. I was fixing some leopard bait with strychnine and dropped a piece."

"He ate it?" Helen said. "You mean he ate it?"

"Yes," Henry said. "And then he died. I do not think he suffered much. He staggered about a bit. Then he seemed all right but later he began shivering and twitching again. He had some spasms, and it was all over."

Helen said, "Oh Bunny, my little Bunny," and began to cry.

Henry did nothing. He just sat there staring at me as if to say: Well, you've had your fun and this is what it's cost you. For me, the real point of interest was that we had had no losses recently from leopards or anything else, so there was no need to be fixing poison bait.

Helen got up and went to their room.

I did not see her till next day. She did not come in to supper. Henry sent something to her but it came back untouched. I saw the boy carrying out the tray later in the evening. I did nothing. I was in no position to do anything.

I told Helen that I'd get her another dog. She said, "No. Not again. I won't go through that again. I must be alone. There must be nothing but me. Nothing else."

I did not realize what she meant then, but later I knew. There must be nothing outside herself that could be hurt. Herself she could withdraw, like a snail into its shell, into a numbness that was beyond hurt.

Of course Henry said he was sorry. He said it quite often so that she should not forget her dog. For weeks he kept saying he was sorry. Sometimes he would call him, holding out a scrap of meat in his hand if we were at a meal, and then say, "Oh. Oh, I forgot." But he had not forgotten, and he did not want her to forget. He wanted the wound of her loss kept open. He wanted the loss of the dog associated with her day in the forest with me, to make her feel that she had killed her own dog.

But he did it with immense charm. It reminded me of the sweets he had bought in public, at school, for the little boys he had tortured in private. Henry ran very true to form. But, after all, it was hard to blame him for his sympathy. If it was sympathy.

I felt it, too. Not only for Helen, but because I had loved the dog. I have a great attachment to the animals who live in the world with us. They do not lie or betray. They are without ulterior motives. Few men are as honest as dogs.

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I missed Bunny's welcome when I came in, the look in his eyes, the wagging of his tail that curled like a brown corkscrew over his back. Something beautiful had gone. It left a space in my life. A line on the page of our living had been crossed out. Henry had taken our perfect day and ground it under his heel as if it had been a flower. It was his right. Helen was his wife. I was just her lover. A lover is a man with many private privileges and no public rights.

There were not many snakes on the ranch. I do not suppose we killed more than one a month near the homestead, and since Helen had been with us we had not had one in the house itself. The commonest were cobras, both the black and the yellow, and puff adders—fat, sluggish, repellent, and dangerous because they lie still, till trodden on, and then strike with long, savage, fatal fangs, sometimes clinging on like bulldogs.

I remember cutting one open and the young coming out of it fully formed and armed with venom. I had promised the skin to a child in Leopoldville and, seeing the moving belly after I had peeled off the skin like a stocking from a woman's leg, I slit it open and they poured out, writhing and angry, complete replicas of their parent, miniature engines of death. The puff adder is viviparous, bringing forth its young alive instead of laying eggs.

One morning, when I was weak with fever and love, I had strolled into the compound, and out of it past the aloe garden to sit on an old ant-heap near the great clumps of bamboo that rose like clusters of plumes out of the ground. Sometimes I met Helen here.

In a low bush I saw two snakes entwined. So even snakes could love. They had my sympathy. A fellow-feeling bound us.

I must have been more ill than I guessed, for it took me almost a minute to see that they were mambas. The most dangerous snakes in Africa. The only one that will attack a man without reason. And fast—as fast, it was said, as a galloping horse. I had often shot them when I was working on a sugar plantation in Mozambique. They travelled like black lightning over the tops of the bushes. It looked as if a long, thick whip thong was being dragged by an invisible hand.

But I was not afraid. The two black mambas were fully occupied, coupled, anaesthetized by sex. They were tied in a long metallic love-knot. In the act of love that would produce eggs and then more snakes. When I left they were still there. I'd been waiting for the herd of cattle we were going to dip. When I saw their dust I moved away.

Later in the day I told Henry I had seen a couple of mambas below the compound.

He said, " And you didn't shoot them? "

I said, " No."

He said, " Why not? "

" I hadn't a gun," I said.

" You could have gone back."

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"I suppose I could have, but I wasn't feeling so hot."

I couldn't tell him that they were making love. That I had had a kind of sympathy for them. Even to speak of them seemed a kind of betrayal, a breach of confidence, and I was sorry the minute I had done it. As I say, I was weak with fever, and in a queer state, what with one thing and another. When he asked me where they were, I said near the aloes we had planted. I didn't want him to go to the bamboos. Helen and I had a kind of nest among them. Hard to find but he might have hit on it.

Unknowingly I had sown a seed. It might have been better if he had found our nest.

The dipping went easily. Once cattle are used to it there is no difficulty. They are driven into the race in lots of twenty or thirty. They plunge into the bath, swim its length, climb out, up the ramp into the drying-race, and stand there, dripping till almost dry. This is how we recover the surplus dip which runs back into the tank. The process is continuous. As soon as one lot is out another goes in.

The cattle were all very tame, having always been gently handled. No boy was allowed a whip. Nor were they allowed to shout or rush the stock in any way. They were dehorned and so made no attempt to attack each other.

I was feeling better now. Fever is like that. It comes and goes. I was not feeling well but I was feeling less like death. Tomorrow I would be all right. I was looking forward to tomorrow, when I should be well. And even taking pleasure in working the sleek, fat, soft-eyed cattle. This was the breeding herd. Mature, heavy cows, gravid, most of them near to calving. And young animals, heifers, making udders for their first lactation.

Among the cows the bulls—one to every twenty-five cows—moved majestically, ponderous, male, virile; they moved sleepily, as if proud of the results they had achieved. It is impossible to ignore bulls. They have always been symbolic of sex, their dangling masculinity is inescapable, with its implication of fertility. The bull, the stallion, the ram step out of the myths of the past into the present, bringing back memories from the days when our ancestors hunted, worshipped, and sacrificed them.

One does not think of these things consciously, but the thoughts are there, hidden under the stock figures, under production costs, stock losses; under feed bills and veterinary supplies. Under the natural laws that govern increase and gestation.

And the wonder, never lost, at birth itself. At the calf—wet, new-born, with white hoofs that darken almost as you watch. Wonder at nature, at God, at mystery. At the flow of blood in the veins of man and beast. At the motives and desires of each. At the similar forces that govern their behaviour. The drive of mating, the mother love.

I remember thinking all this many times. I have never forgotten those thoughts. No city has been able to obliterate them. They have at times been covered up, lost, because of new excitements,

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but they have come back. They have never been totally destroyed.

It was in this mood that I returned to the homestead. Something was going on. I hurried up the steps of the stoep. Henry was standing with his thumbs hooked in his belt and a wide smile on his face.

Helen was screaming in the bedroom, " Let me out! Let me out! " The key was turned on the outside of the door.

" It's a joke," he said. " She thinks there's a snake in there. A live snake. I faked it."

Helen was hammering at the door with her fists and screaming, " Let me out! Let me out! " She sounded hysterical with fright.

Henry lit a cigarette. " Just a joke," he said. " She's so nervous of snakes, I thought this would cure her."

" Bloody silly joke," I said.

That was about all I could say. It was his wife. It was his house. I was in his employ. I thought of her sobbing against the door. On the other side of it, only about ten feet away. She beat it with her hands in a kind of tattoo. Then she screamed and I heard her fall.

She upset something as she went down. It must be the small table that stood near the door, on which she kept her magazines. I heard it crash to the floor.

" About time you had a look, Henry," I said. " I should think the joke has gone on long enough."

He got up and went towards the door.

That's when I should have killed him, when he turned. If there had been a crowbar on the table I might have. But you don't find crowbars on sitting-room tables. I turned to look, as if God might have placed one there ready to my hand. A miracle. In my mind I felt it in my hands. I felt its weight. I felt my arm muscles raise it and bring it down.

Now I knew what people meant when they said they saw red. At that instant I saw it. Red murder. How simple. How easy. I suddenly wanted to kill Henry. It would be a permanent satisfaction. Sleeping with a woman was never that. Love was never that. You were always wanting more. Waiting for the next time. Thinking of it, even before this time was finished. But murder—how final! I felt queer as fury suffused me like blood. I felt hot. As if blood were running over me the way it does when you are wounded.

Then I grew cold. The way blood feels when it chills off. First it runs hot, then cold. Oh, what a lot I knew suddenly. I had seen red. Now that was over. I would never see red again, not for Henry. Now I felt cold like iron. Hard like iron. My lip had stopped trembling. I was not going to cry. How absurd a man looks crying. I would never cry again, because my face was hard, it was turning to stone.

We were about three paces from the door. All this had happened before Henry reached it. I never moved. Somehow I knew what he would see. I knew he had killed her. He unlocked the door,

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and turned the handle. It opened only a few inches. He pushed. She must have fallen against it, I thought. I knew she had because I had heard her. But somehow I repeated the words again in my mind. As if to confirm the fact, to prove how right I had been. I felt nothing now. No pain, no sorrow, no anger.

Henry shouted, " My God! " and slammed the door.

" What is it? " I said.

" A snake," he said.

" That's what you said," I said. " A joke with a snake."

" But it's alive," he said. " It's a mamba! "

" It must have gone for her then, I suppose," I said. My voice was quite controlled. So this was how dead men spoke.

" I suppose so," he said. " My God! How awful! " But I'm not sure he thought it was awful.

He got his shotgun from the rack and put in two shells. " I'll shoot it through the window," he said. He went out onto the stoep.

I heard him poke the barrel through the window. The glass fell with a tinkle on the granolithic floor. Then there was a shot. I waited. There ought to be another one, just to make sure. And I certainly wasn't going to go in till he'd fired again. That would have been too easy. If he had killed one of us, why not the other, in this accidental crime of passion? He would be able to say: I was just giving it the second barrel when he came in.

Oh no, it wasn't going to be like that at all. I was going to kill him. He wasn't going to kill me.

I thought how interesting hate was. How Henry and I were now tied together till death did us part, in a marriage from which there was no divorce. If I'd had the guts and the money to run off with Helen—and guts and money were curiously allied. The one was no good without the other. And it might not have lasted. But this would last.

Henry had said once, " You ought to have a hobby, Jim." That was about the time he'd begun to suspect us, I think. A way of telling me he knew. Well, I thought, I've got a hobby now. Hate, that I can cultivate. That I can nurse and care for till its bloom is ready to pluck.

He fired the second shot. It made a hell of a noise in the house. The whole place smelt of powder. I noticed the second shot more than the first one. I decided I had been a bit numbed then. Suffering from shock. Now I wasn't suffering from anything. There was no question about what we should do now. There was no we. There was only this splendid hate. I was a purpose, not a man.

He was back now with the twelve-bore over his arm. He put it down on the table. " Let's go in," he said. He led the way.

He had blown the leg off one of the chairs when he'd fired. It lay drunkenly on its side. There, near the door, was the table she had knocked down, with the magazines spilt like a pack of enormous cards. Magazines were one of Henry's extravagances. The only

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palliative he ever gave her loneliness. There was glass from the window where he'd poked his gun through the pane. The hole in the mosquito-netting showed a ragged edge behind the glass. The mamba, cut in half by the shot, lay in two twitching portions, like long black pieces of rubber hose, only more metallic-looking. Then, I saw the dead one that Henry had arranged coiled on the dressing-table.

Helen lay crumpled on the floor. Her hair was spread out round her face. Her eyes were wide open, staring. Her contracted pupils tiny, fixed in a look of horror. Foam and saliva dribbled from her slack, half-open mouth.

In my mind, with a different part of me—my intelligence, utterly divorced from my heart—I went over the symptoms of snakebite. If she had been killed by a viper, a puff adder for instance, there would have been patches of subcutaneous haemorrhage that would be spreading over her body.

She lay crumpled like a rag doll on the floor. She was beyond pain or pleasure. She could not feel my love, she could not touch my body. Five minutes ago she could have. She must have been thinking of me, hoping I'd save her but afraid to call my name.

I thought, Of course, the dead don't feel anything, about anything. So all this is nonsense. I nearly laughed. I'm getting hysterical, I thought. What struck me as so funny was that I was more dead than she, because I knew about it. Henry hardly looked at her. He was looking at the snake, the black mamba that he'd blown in half.

It was interesting to use his name, to feel my lips form it. Lips that had kissed her, had kissed her body. I said, "That was a curious joke you played, Henry."

"Why?" he said.

"Because you know, and I know, that if you kill a mamba its mate will look for it."

"I didn't know that," he said.

Then he said, "I forgot."

Then he said, "I didn't know it was a mamba."

I said, "How odd. After I'd told you. And she was so nervous and highly strung."

He said, "You ought to know."

I said, "Certainly. Except for yourself I suppose no one knew her better."

He let it lie. I said no more.

I suddenly knew him so well. Better than he knew himself. I saw he had been killing her for months. Trying to send her off her head.

Of course I'd known it before, and so had Helen. But we had refused to face it. There had been so many things. The scorpion he had placed among her handkerchiefs had been dead, certainly. Henry said her dog had not suffered much . . .

Some men cannot bear to see anything happy. It detracts from their own importance. People can escape into happiness.

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We stood looking down at her. She was very small and slight. The mamba had probably knocked her down as he struck. They strike with immense power. It had hit her in the neck. Below the ear there was the discoloration of the bite. It was turning purple now, becoming blotched like an orchid. Her hair, that I had always said looked like citrus honey, so thick, soft, almost white in its fairness, looked dead. In one's hand it had flowed like honey, in a thick soft stream.

I looked at her red-painted nails, one of her little vanities. She never saw why, even out in the *bundu*, one shouldn't try to look nice. How often had I kissed those fingers. How often had they caressed me. One of her sandals was off. She had beautiful feet, small and soft-boned. To hold one was like holding a flower in one's hand. How tiny the red nail of the little toe looked. It always made her squeal to have them nibbled. I knew the rest of her better than I knew my own body, because one's own body does not interest one much.

This was not my Helen. This thing on the floor was nothing to me. We were dead, Helen and I.

"You'd better pick her up," I said to Henry. "Put her on the bed." He did not move.

"I wonder how the snake got in," I said.

"Rat hole," he said. "There are always holes. Tunnels. It got in the walls and then it dropped from the thatch."

I said, "Yes."

But I was looking for a hole at ground level. I found it in a few minutes. Henry had stooped down and was arranging her clothes. I had made love to her in that frock a week ago.

Her little cutting whip, it was made of rhino horn, was on the window-sill. I had given it to her when I taught her to ride. I pushed it through the hole in the wall. Then I went out and picked it up. There was the snake's spoor in the dust of the stoep and beyond it on the garden path.

But it wasn't quite like that. It was the way I had known it would be. There was the spoor of the dead snake where Henry had dragged it to the hole. He must have enlarged the hole, pushed the dead snake in, and then gone round and pulled it through from inside before arranging it so artistically on her dressing-table. But I don't believe she'd even had time to see it.

It was the second spoor that interested me. That of the mating snake which wove over it in swift loops. I could imagine it coming, seeking out the female. Later I picked it up farther down in the compound. The mamba can stand up for two-thirds of its height on its tail, and weaves there, standing much higher than a man, before it strikes. That's what she had seen when she was screaming and hammering at the door. Poor Helen.

The blood, almost black, still seeped from the wound. Her heart was still beating as I slipped my hand down the neck of her dress on to her soft, warm breast. How often had my hands found her breasts and held them like two small warm throbbing birds

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cupped in my palms. But with snakebite the heart may go on beating for some time after breathing has stopped. I had one hand behind her shoulders. Her head sagged on the slim neck that no longer supported it. She was dead. For the first time in front of Henry I was holding her in my arms and he was looking at us. At me with my hand on her breast. My hand that knew the whole of her.

I said, " We'll get her onto the bed."

Henry helped me lift her, taking her legs above the ankles. How small and fine they were. They were the first things I had noticed about her when I had sat beside her in the truck the day she arrived. The first thing I had touched when I made love to her. Her body drooped in an arc between us.

" My God! " Henry said. " I didn't expect this. It was just a joke."

" You'll play no more jokes on her now," I said. In my mind I was cursing him with every obscenity.

We laid her down. I got a damp face-rag and wiped her lips. I tied up her jaws with a white silk handkerchief. There were flies on her eyes when I put coins on her eyelids to hold them. I folded her hands across her breast. So she lay on the bed like a tiny crusader above his tomb.

I seemed to see Bunny lying extended at her feet. Perhaps he was, perhaps her brave little dog had rejoined her in death. That once more they were together. It's up to you now, Bunny, I thought. Stay with her till I come.

We left her and went for the whisky. We drank a bottle that night. In silence. Each busy with his own thoughts. Each alone with his memories. I do not think Henry had noticed me poke her little whip through the hole in the wall, or go out to find the spoor.

Later I made it my business to find out more about mambas. More than I knew already, that is.

They have a duplicate pair of fangs. The poison gland is behind the eyes and is connected with the fang by a tube or duct. The venom acts directly on the nervous system with all the elepidae family of snakes, and unless injected into a vein, when it is carried to the heart and causes almost instantaneous death, temporarily accelerates that organ but causes cerebral spinal paralysis. The nerve centres controlling the action of the lungs are paralysed and breathing ceases, although the heart may continue to beat for some time.

I became an expert on snakes. I borrowed books. I bought books. Looking back, I can see now that I was mad. Helen had sent me mad with a blend of sentiment and sensuality, but this may have been partly due to the conditions under which we lived.

My own feeling was—and it has not changed—that Henry was sick of her and wanted to get rid of her. Hence the joke, which he thought, if nothing more serious happened, might cause a nervous breakdown that in a country like this was almost bound to be serious.

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In a curious blend of hate and humour, he had planned this. If the snake had not come in the afternoon I think he would have found some reason for not spending the night in the house. He would have decided to go hunting with his flashlight. Thus it might have killed me too, caught, as it were, *flagrante delicto*. It was the kind of situation he enjoyed. With Henry something was always left to those capricious gods of chance with whom he felt himself allied.

There was no time to make a coffin. Nor had we the materials. A grave was dug. I chose the place near the aloes among the rocks that she had always loved. Henry said, " Put it wherever you think best." He was acting the part of a heartbroken man.

She was carried by Henry and me. Behind us came Colley—our good friend and neighbour, the Rev. Franklin Collison—in his surplice. The grave was lined with lilies that I had picked in the forest. They had begun to turn brown by the time we got there. There was a pillow for her head. It was I who jumped into the grave and took her body from Henry. I who laid her on her flowery bed. Did Henry know? Did he see this as a kind of final, permitted adultery? I put nothing past him, past his twisted mind.

Colley read the service beautifully, in all its melancholy. Dust to dust, and the rest of it. The boys shovelled in the red Congo earth. Later, pending the arrival of a stone that Henry had ordered from Leopoldville, I made a rough wooden cross.

Henry typed out a statement of what had happened for the authorities and sent me off with it.

He said, " Tell the Chef I am too broken to come . . ."

We both signed it. Colley had added his signature.

I broke the journey at the Beach and went on by piragua. Monsieur Fouquet had gone. His replacement was a much younger man called Colbert, who was most sympathetic. Of course no details were given. It was simply stated that Monsieur Henry Seaman regretted to report that his wife had been bitten by a mamba that had found its way into the house and had died within ten minutes in spite of all efforts to save her.

" You had serum, monsieur? " he asked.

" Oh yes," I said.

" You injected her? " It was no use saying she had been dead when we got to her.

" Yes," I said, " but the bite was high in the neck." It was easier to put it this way. I wanted no further inquiry. For once Henry and I thought the same way about Helen.

" With a mamba it is often high," he said. " They can stand up for two-thirds of their length, as you know—taller than a man."

" I know, monsieur."

" And how long was it? "

" Two metres fifty," I said. " I have the skin." I put it on the table.

He picked it up. It unrolled like a great typewriter ribbon. " What a tragedy! " he said.

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" I see from the files," he continued, " that a few months ago an indigenous man was killed by driver ants on your ranch."

I said, " Yes, that was an unfortunate accident."

He said, " You have bad fortune. It makes one think . . ."

" Think what, monsieur? "

" It gives one to think," he said again. He paused. " I who speak am not of Belgium. I am Congolais. I was born here. My father was also a functionary. So I see things in a different manner."

" What do you see? " I asked.

" You seem an intelligent young man, so I will tell you," he said. " If you repeat it, I will deny it—" he smiled—" after all, we are alone and without witnesses."

He seemed to change his line and said, " My father was in these parts many years ago as a young man. He told me things . . ."

I said, " He told you? "

" He told me this was a special sacred area. At that time there was some question of its being opened up. They began a road but abandoned it on his advice. But he said to me, ' If ever it is developed, my little one, those who go there will have bad luck. Things will not go well with them.' "

" The farm has prospered," I said. " Our losses are small."

" Yours," he said. " But as an administrator I do not see things in terms of cattle, but of men. Leopard-murders. The death of that man by ants. The death of Madame Seaman. I regret I never met her. I hear she was young and beautiful."

" She was beautiful," I said, " and young." How far away she seemed. " Leopard-men? " I continued. " Then there is something in it? "

" There is a great deal. A lot has been going on. Proof? " He raised his hands. " Of course there is no proof. I do not think my colleague, Monsieur Fouquet, appreciated it. He is not a Colonial. Me, I feel things here." He put his hand over his heart. " It is good to see a strange face. Only tragic that it should be for such a cause."

Sometimes I went into Helen's room—I still thought of it like that—when Henry had gone out in the truck with his rifle. It did not matter even if I had been found there, because that was where he kept his safe to which I had a key, and the stock and account books to which we attended together. I would open the safe and get out some of the books or files. And then go to the cupboard.

Her clothes were still there on the hangers. She had been very careful with her clothes. Every dress held a memory, as it had once held her body. Memories of love or the hope of it. They all came back when I looked at her empty clothes.

Her perfume still remained, clinging to the frocks, to the wood of the closet. A faint emanation, weakening each time I opened the door. Fading as memory is supposed to fade, as colour fades in a picture. But there was no fading of her image in my eyes. I saw

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her as I had always seen her, as I see her still. I saw myself reflected in her eyes when I looked into them.

Below her dresses were her shoes standing on their high heels like little soldiers on parade. I knew them all. She had walked eagerly in these shoes to meet me. On them she had left me. I picked up a white one. The buckskin was soft in my hand. I stroked its nap. I rubbed it up the wrong way and smoothed it down again against my cheek.

Henry had laughed when I'd scratched the soles of her new shoes. "You don't let her do much for herself, do you?" he had said.

I'd said, "She is not used to polished cement floors."

He'd shown no resentment. Only a mild, amused kind of curiosity that I should care whether she fell or not. He always thought someone falling was funny—an accident was always a joke to him.

Finally—and the situation repeated itself often—I'd close the cupboard, and then I felt as if I had imprisoned her. Shut her away. But each time she lived more vividly for me. Each time some new memory, something I had forgotten with the top of my mind, came back. Some subtlety, some touch of the hand, some look when she came into the room, some promise in her eyes.

Then I would put back the books, lock the safe again, and go out.

Each visit was a new experience, each like a separate act of love, each another page added to the book of our love, that had not been ended with her death, that has not ended yet, that will never end. Perhaps if it had gone on long enough it might have ended as such things do. This I do not know. Only that it has not ended, that the ache remains. That I still wake in the night with her name upon my lips.

The house seemed very empty after Helen's death. The light had gone out of it. After the first few days Henry did not seem to be much affected. For me, my life was ended. I was still alive but I was a different man.

I did my work. In fact I worked harder. There was no reason to return to the house now. No one to watch. For watching the perfection of her movements had been one of my pleasures. Sometimes I went down to her grave by the aloes and put flowers on it. It was impossible to believe that she had really gone. That she would not come back. That I would never see her come in through the door with the sunlight in her hair.

Then slowly an idea took form in my mind. A terrible idea. It came like a living thing, stalking like a tiger over the veld of my mind. Like a leopard. I still, like so many South Africans, called them tigers. But it came slowly like a tiger, belly down, hidden behind bushes, behind clumps of grass, behind other motives, behind things that my mind said were one thing and my heart knew to be another. There had been the moment when I could have killed Henry had I had a weapon at hand. Then a kind of death

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with her death. Then my hatred that I had nourished but still the hatred of a man who was spiritually dead—broken by his disaster and without the energy to implement it.

Where was the new, the real beginning? When I bought the Mannlicher from Pedro da Costa, perhaps? That was a conscious act because I had said, "Will you sell it, senhor?" And I had bargained with him for it. I must not let him know that I must have it at any price. When I first picked it up it fitted my hand like a woman's breast, as naturally. The nickelled action slid as smooth as woman's silk. I made him test it for me at three hundred yards. Why did I not try it myself? I forget the excuse. I bought five hundred rounds of ammunition.

My subconscious mind must have been warning me of planning something. You don't want him to know you're a good shot. I had shot at Bisley. I could not miss. It was owing to my score that my school had carried off the Ashburton Shield. I had given up shooting big game—for me, it was not sport, it was murder.

The plan began to develop. To show its hand as if it were a living thing.

When I got back, Henry said, "Why, I thought you'd given up shooting! You've never shot anything except a bird since you've been here."

I said, "I know. But I used to be a good shot and I'm going to try again and see what I can do."

"Go ahead and try," he said. He thought it a great joke. A bigger joke still when I went out day after day and brought home nothing except the story of my misses.

"I can't understand it, Henry," I used to say. "I can't understand it at all. I used to be so good." But if I missed the buck I seemed to shoot at I always hit the twig or sapling beside it at which I had aimed.

I was shooting better than I had ever shot in my life. That was all I had to do now. Just go on shooting. And wait, my secret self told me. Wait. It must not be too soon. What must not? I had no idea. Or had I?

Anyway, things went on like this for a full year. Christmas passed again. A hot, heavy African Christmas, white in patches where the great cottonwoods blossomed their silky seeds that hung like burst powder-puffs and fell softly to the ground. Henry and I drank to absent friends. There had been more of those mauve, scented letters for him, so no doubt he was thinking of replacing Helen, the irreplaceable. It was to her alone I drank. My friend now for ever absent.

I felt her presence. In the night I saw her coming into my room as she used to sometimes, for Henry slept like a log, like the dead, with a kind of gross, snorting, grampus sleep, puffing and blowing, sweating as he lay on his bed. In my sleep, and my half sleep, I was seldom alone. It was more than memory and less than a spirit. It was an emanation, like a remembered perfume, so that I would say to myself: Yes, it was like this.

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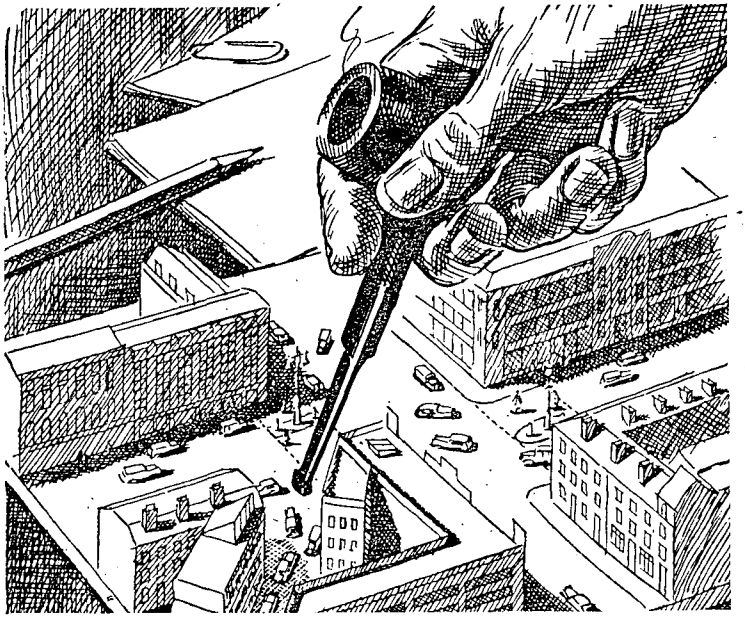

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Sometimes I thought of justice. Where was the justice in the death of someone so young, so fair, so good? For there had been no wickedness in Helen, no cruelty. Her wickedness, such as it was, was an escape from Henry, a method of retaining her sanity; a reflection, as in a mirror, of his own moods that drove her to me. Was it just that Henry should live and Helen die? That was the core round which my mind revolved.

Then my chance came. I did not even know then that it was my chance. Only something that I must do.

One evening when I was out I saw the kudu. There were plenty of kudu but this was the king of them all, with long spiral, twisted horns that reached upwards like great corkscrews opening the sky. Henry had a passion for record or near-record heads. He had splendid specimens of kudu, though none as good as this, and sable that we call *swartwitpentz*, and giant sable from Angola, impala, reedbuck, water buck, buffalo, bush cow, oryx from the Sudan. I doubt if there was a finer collection in the Congo.

I told him where I had seen it. Beyond a gap, a break in the low hills. " The biggest I've ever seen," I said. He knew I had seen a lot of kudu.

" I'll go tomorrow," he said.

I said, " You'd better. I expect he'll still be there."

The kudu had been eating beans below the trees. The curled seedpods of the thorn are one of their favourite delicacies. There were kaffir oranges there, too, another thing they love, and I had not disturbed him. " I'm glad you didn't try for him," he said.

" What would have been the good? " I said. " Shooting as I do. I'd only have frightened him."

Even now I had no real idea what I was doing. It was as if I were being directed by some outside force. The great moment had come. There was a beast in the forest. The bait was there. My heart beat like a bird in my breast.

This was to be the end, the last movement, the grand finale of the ballet that had begun when Helen first stepped out of the little wood-burner onto the Beach. The first step had been hers, when that bare white buckskin-shod foot had touched the wooden baulks of the dock. Helen and Henry. Then I had joined in, circling about them. Then Marie-Thérèse had joined us in the dark background where the scenery was confused, where the spotlight never struck, but where one could feel her presence . . .

The kudu was the bait, grazing unaware, trotting magnificently through the forests, galloping with his great horns laid along his back, his chin raised as he avoided the passing branches. Couldn't all life be seen in terms of bait, of baited traps? Desire for riches, for women, for glory? The field of desire was the field of magnetism. And that was more than an analogy, for certainly men and women were drawn to each other . . .

And the kudu? This time the kudu would escape. There would be an accident.

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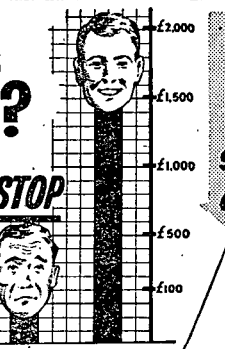

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Sept.57 I.C.38D

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Africa is at its most beautiful in this evening light. This was the light in which Helen and I had basked as we drove home after our day in the forest. It was drink time. Sundowner time. The time when the game begins to move through the lilac light. The shadows of the trees were long. Even tussocks of grass and quite small stones threw big shadows that were out of all proportion to their actual size. It was a lilac-and-pink world, shadowed with black and indigo. The yellow grass and the olive-green trees were rose-washed. There was a rush of wings as a flight of namaqua doves swept down towards the river to drink. A steenbok ram, with tiny black needle horns, immense dark eyes, and ears like wings, peeped over the grass and, seeing me, crept away.

The late bees were still busy in the flowering thorns. Their white flowers scented the atmosphere with a perfume that reminded me of a mixture of sweet peas and lilac. The halfway-house tree on the way to the Beach had smelt like this when Helen came.

I found the place I was looking for. A small flat rock outcrop almost completely surrounded by bush. I was now exactly four hundred yards from the gap in the ridge that Henry would have to cross to get to what we called the river bush. It was beautifully illuminated. The sun was behind me. Four hundred yards. I had paced it twice. In this same light I had fired at least twenty rounds at that range and never missed.

I was taking advantage of Henry's love of hunting to trap him. A man can always be trapped by his love, betrayed by it. It was a beautiful evening for murder, for justice, for execution. A beautiful time. Drink time, sundowner time.

I was happy, lying on the warm rock with my hate. My hate was my love. I was waiting for the moment. My rifle cradled in my hand was warm with the dying sunshine, shining beautifully, the polished brown wood of the stock and the lovely gunmetal-blue of the barrel.

I looked at a bluejay that had perched on the dead limb in front of me. A roller, one of the world's most beautiful birds, with an electric-blue head, a pink chest, green neck, and ultramarine wings and tail. The tail is forked like a swallow's. I knew as I looked at it that Henry was coming. That it would sit still till I fired. Then it would fly up, almost straight into the air before it went off with its diving flight to find a safer perch. I had not yet seen him. But I felt him coming.

I dropped my eyes from the bird and there he was, strolling towards the gap. He was a poor mark really, at that range, in his khaki bush-jacket and shorts. But not for me. I tried to take my mind off him because I feared he might feel me killing him. The rifle came up softly, slowly. The bluejay never moved. I cuddled the butt against my cheek and snuggled down on the rock. My feet were stretched out flat. My legs wide open, extended. There was the backsight in front of me, and the barleycorn of the foresight. I took a fine sight with that rifle.

And there was Henry, his head just visible above the foresight.

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The back-sight framed him. I thought of the way he would look from the barrel. The way the bullet would see him. My eyes were in the bullet. My eyes, my heart, my blood. The sum total of my personality would direct it. I took the first pull. I squeezed. In the hundredth of a thousandth of a second the striker would be freed, would set off the fulminate of mercury in the cap, explode the cordite, and drive the bullet towards him. Drive me forth, for I was the bullet.

The explosion came. The recoil drove into my shoulder. The rifle lived in my arms, leaping into them. The little man that was Henry threw up his hands and fell, as I had known he would. How neat. How clean. No cry. No blood. Not even a man had died. That little thing was not a man. It could not cry out or bleed. It was too far away.

I ejected the spent cartridge and left it lying there. Why not? I had shot at a buck, a little steenbok ram with horns like tiny black needles. But as usual I had missed him and he had jumped away. Or had I imagined him? Anyway, it was drink time. Sundowner time. I would get back just before darkness fell.

I say I did not know when it began. I am wrong. It began when Helen screamed behind the door and I had first thought of murder. Then I had put the thought away. It had returned as justice, as execution. That was when I had bought the Mannlicher. But I had not known it then. I had only known that I must shoot again and let no one suspect how well I shot . . .

It was almost dark when I got back. The house was beautifully silent. Tonight there would be no ghosts. I had a wonderful sense of completion, of accomplishment. I was relaxed. At peace. The lamps hissed pleasantly. The sitting-room looked very comfortable, homelike. I called my boy, Emile.

"Where is the master?" I asked.

"He still out. The truck is not back," he said. "He hunt."

"Ah," I said. "Then tell the cook we will wait." Henry was late sometimes and I always waited.

I poured myself out a whisky. Just two fingers, not a big one. I wound up the gramophone and put on a record. The music filled the room. I lit a cigarette and sat back. The tomtoms began as it grew dark. The fireflies lit their lamps. Night had begun. This was a memorable occasion. I would have liked to have a feast. Champagne and old brandy. We had some for special occasions. But everything must remain normal. I called Emile.

"I am going to look for the master. Something must have happened. Get out the boys and all the lanterns. Tell the capita to come." I got my torch. "You come with me, Emile," I said.

Then I drove out the boys in groups, each with a stable lantern. They feared the night. I knew they would not search far and would end up in the village. But I was creating a pattern of anxiety. We hunted all night. I said, "The truck must have broken down."

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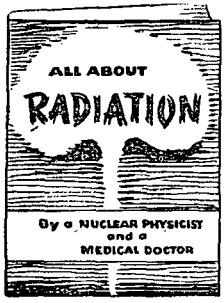

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At dawn we found him. What was left of him. The hyenas had gone, and now the ants were busy.

It was Emile who first spotted the circling vultures. Then we found the truck. From there it had been easy for one of the trackers who had joined us to pick up the spoor. We followed the line he had taken.

This time it was Henry who went into the bag. I sent a boy back to the truck for one. There were always a few in it for the boys to sit on. There was his skull, the shivered bones, and parts of his shoes—they had been eaten, too. Some rags and buttons—all that was left of his clothes—and the rifle. No shot had been fired but there was a round in the breech. The safety-catch was on. There was his cigarette case dented with a bite. Almost flattened out, in fact. And his hunting-knife. Some scraps of paper—among them what was left of a mauve, perfumed letter, damp with blood and the heavy dew.

All round him were the tracks of the hyenas, the feathers and white chalky excrement of the vultures that had quarrelled over his body.

I sat and smoked with the boys round me while I waited for the bag from the truck. Then we went off. Emile carried the bag. I put it on the floor beside me while I drove back. As soon as I'd had breakfast I would take him to the Chef de District. To my friend Colbert. I knew he would again say that this was a place of bad fortune. I would agree with him. I would write to the Company. I could do that on the way, at Pedro's, and Colbert could post it with a duplicate of his own report. I'd send a plantation runner to Colley with the news and tell him what I was doing. Say I would look him up as soon as I got back.

There had been no reason for all my precautions. I had found the bullet. It was safe in my pocket. I have it still. A distorted little lump of lead and nickel in the morocco box in which I keep my cuff-links and oddments. Curious that I had not thought of the hyenas. But as soon as I had seen that the body was destroyed, I had told Emile to wait. I had said I wanted to approach alone. I did not want a lot of spoor round him. Then I had found the bullet flattened against the rock it had struck after passing through him.

There had been a certain perfection about the whole thing.

I talked to the boys. "What happened, do you think?"

"He must have hurt himself. A snake, perhaps? Or fallen, and then the wild beasts came."

I would suggest that to Colbert. Suggest a stroke—he was so fat. A touch of the sun—excitement—hunting. A fall, a stroke, a snake? Who could tell? I'd shrug my shoulders. My friend, mon copain, my comrade of so many long days and nights dans la brousse. My old school friend. The tragedy. First his beautiful young wife. Now the man himself. Perhaps her death had made him careless.

The next day was fine. Not too hot, although of course it was

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early yet. The truck seemed to be running exceptionally well. The engine purred as if content. Henry had been hard on it, changing gear roughly. Only with animals was Henry gentle, and then only when they submitted to him. First, he broke them. It was because he had not been able to break Helen, because he could not own her utterly—for although he had her terrified a small hard core remained inviolate—that he had hated her. How true it was that hate begot hate.

The Company would expect me to run the ranch. I would do it for a year or so. Then I would go home. Now I could go. I could say, "Oh yes, I'm running a big ranch in the Congo. Twenty thousand hectares." In my mind I again heard Helen say, "And what is a hectare, Henry?" A lot of her conversation came back to me in its childish, banal simplicity. Yet how wonderful it had seemed.

I stopped at the usual halfway house and had my usual lunch. There must be nothing different. I would like to have taken a bottle of Henry's wine. He was always very mean with it. But I didn't. I had beer and bully.

Pedro wanted my story. He'd heard of it already from his boys, but not the details. The drum could give no details. I knew that Colbert would know too. Pedro's chief interest was in Henry's effects, his rifles. He said, "You will sell them, I suppose?"

I said, "I suppose so."

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Then he said, " That was a lovely Mannlicher I sold you. A lovely gun. Do you remember my trying it for you? "

I said, " Yes."

He said, " I suppose you never shot anything with it? "

I said, " No." My bad shooting was a joke for a hundred miles round. " I'm a very poor shot with a rifle, but I'm all right with a shotgun."

" How beautiful she was! " Pedro said.

I said, " Yes. She was."

" And now both are dead."

I said, " Yes."

He said, " Perhaps it is as well. There were the elements of tragedy there. He would have been a bad man to cross."

Then we started drinking seriously.

I have an idea that he thought there was more in the situation than met the eye, and that drink would loosen my tongue. But I was too clever for him. I simply promised to sell him anything of value that Henry had left. His guns, luggage, clothes.

His smaller personal effects—his watch, the crushed cigarette case, papers, and so on—I would send back to his parents.

Next day I took Pedro's motor boat up to the Chef de District. I found him preoccupied. Even the savage-looking police askaris looked different.

The red, yellow, and black flag of Belgium hung dejectedly as usual from its black-and-white-striped barber pole. The bare parade-ground remained as dusty as ever but the place had an air of expectancy, of waiting. Not for me, I hoped.

It was not for me.

" So," my friend Colbert said when I went into his office. Its walls were lined with maps, with graphs and official notices. " So," he said; " there has been another tragedy? "

I said, " Yes. You have heard? "

" Of course I have heard. Give me the details."

I gave them to him.

" Ah," he said. " Another little drama."

I said, " I have the remains in my truck for your inspection. The skull . . ."

" Mon dieu! " he said. " Do not talk to me of skulls. Come! " he said, pushing back his chair so violently that it fell. " Come! " he repeated.

He opened the door of a small room. " Skulls," he said. " Just look at that one! The work of leopards. Except that it was found wrapped up in her own loincloth. Figure to yourself a leopard doing that. But that is what they say. A leopard did it. A forest leopard. It is enough to send a man mad."

He raised his hands to his hair, running his fingers through it. " And here, look at this! " He pulled a crate out of a corner and tipped its contents onto the concrete floor. " Here—" he picked up a kind of poker divided at the end into three sharp prongs— " here is the instrument. Here is part of the uniform." He handed

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me the spotted leopard-cloth that I had given Marie-Thérèse as a present.

I said, " But I know that. I bought some of that material from da Costa a year or so ago. It was the only piece."

" Yes," he said, " I have traced it to him. And you gave it to a half-caste woman. Marie-Thérèse, the mistress of the deceased."

" Yes. If you want to put it that way. Is she implicated? "

" Certainly she is. She knows something. But what can I prove? You find me distracted," he continued, " up to the neck in this affair, and then you must come with your little drama of the forest. It is sad. It is regrettable. But is Monsieur Seaman the first man to have an accident out hunting? And you—you want to show me his skull, his remains. My God! This is the country of skulls."

I said, " I only wish to have everything in order."

" Nothing can be in order here. You will stay the night? I will give orders."

" You will make a report? " I said.

" Of course. What is another report? That is what I do. I solve no problems. I make reports."

" I would like a duplicate for the Company."

" I will give you a duplicate and then tomorrow you will take your skull and give it a Christian burial."

I said, " Certainly, monsieur, if that is in order."

" In order? " he cried. " It is more, it is an order! " Then he apologized. " I am sorry," he said.

I said, " Never mind. I can understand what you feel."

" How can you? " he said. " You do not know. For months now it has been going on. Disappearances. One here, one there. Often a hundred miles apart but the centre is at Magobo. There is a traffic in human flesh. The *borfima* fetish," he said, " that is not of the Congo. It is West African from Sierra Leone, but it is here, at least I think it is here, a fetish made of human flesh . . ." He sat with his head bowed and his hands covering his eyes.

During dinner, I assured Monsieur Colbert that no man could have done more, and tried to get him on to his hobbies. But the hunting stories always came back to leopards, and the leopard-men. Before dinner he had typed out his report and given me a copy.

In the morning I went back. Spent another night with da Costa, reassured him of my intentions about Henry's effects, and then drove on to Colley's mission. I told Colley I would have everything ready for the funeral the following day.

I had much to arrange. There must be a clearance. Henry's clothes and guns packed up for sale, an inventory made of the small articles of interest or value to be returned to his parents, the letters of sympathy to be written. His papers, many of which I thought would only upset the dear ones at home, who thought him a paragon of virtue, to be destroyed, and Helen's things, now that he was dead, to be dealt with. I would burn them.

Then a new and terrible idea came to me. Perhaps Henry had

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loved her. Perhaps she was the only thing he had ever loved and, because of it, had feared. So he had had to humiliate her, to break her and weaken her power. Perhaps he had suffered but had shown nothing. That was his pride, in being hard, untouched by anything.

Perhaps that was why he had never got rid of her things.

But I put the thought out of my mind. It was no use being too imaginative.

Justice had been done.

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ARGOSTRIPS

Competitors were asked to supply two sentences continuing the winning entries from our Flying Starters contest. The liveliest Argostrips continued Iain Crawford's:

Night oozed seamily across the garbage-bestrewn yard. He opened the lid of the dustbin and looked out.

Our prize is divided. A guinea goes to Mrs. Campbell, St. Boswells, Roxburghshire, for:

The cats were still there, ringed round him; their mouths opening in delicate anticipation, the small tongues curled between their teeth. The merman shivered, and lowered the lid again, apprehensively twitching his fishy half.

Second guinea to G. Roberts, Singapore, who wrote the following sequel to David Platt's *Kilowatts are unpleasant playmates when they are naked in the dark—*

Then he found the switch, and regretted the finding. Six Odalisques and one electrician were now naked in the light.

We didn't feel that any suggestions for the defunct Mrs. Reece were original enough to qualify for a prize.

SOLUTIONS to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Periscope.* 9, *Banter.* 10, *Boomerang.* 11, *Thirst.* 12, *Charleroi.* 13, *Advice.* 17, *Wag.* 19, *Sirocco.* 20, *Abigail.* 21, *Egg.* 23, *Revels.* 27, *Incurious.* 28, *Caddie.* 29, *Chaffinch.* 30, *Sunset.* 31, *Stillness.*

Down. 2, *Epochs.* 3, *Immure.* 4, *Curves.* 5, *Pandora.* 6, *Sanhedrim.* 7, *Ptarmigan.* 8, *Brotherly.* 14, *Ostracism.* 15, *Provident.* 16, *Acclaimed.* 17, *Woe.* 18, *Gag.* 22, *Gun-shot.* 24, *Rueful.* 25, *Titian.* 26, *Quacks.*

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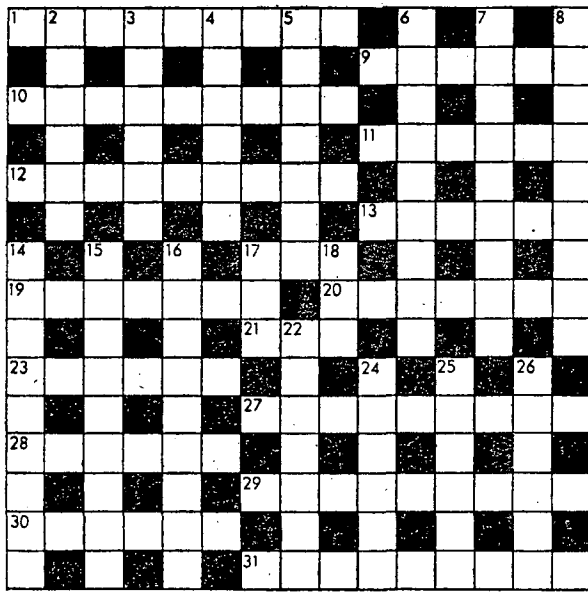
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

★



CLUES

Across

1 Glass for observing Persian fairy ? (9).

9 Make fun of a slimmer (6).

10 Primitive missile makes a come-back (9).

11 Well satisfied craving (6).

12 Real choir astray in Belgium (9).

13 —— to those about to marry—don't (6).

17 Joker started to bet (3).

19 You get the wind up in the desert (7).

20 Maid sounds like a large beer (7).

21 Proverbially hard to shave (3).

23 "Antony, that —— long o' nights" (Shakespeare) (6).

27 Incur IOU's—not interested (9).

28 Porter sounds a nasty little chap ? (6).

29 Husks plus three barleycorns for the bird (9).

30 Poetically accompanied by evening star (6).

31 Tells sins, hush (9).

Down

2 Great times of Cheops ? (6).

3 Shut up (6).

4 Lines of beauty (6).

5 Hers wasn't a hopeless case (7).

6 I'm rash Ned in Hebrew court (9).

7 P.T. starts off a grouse (9).

8 Fraternal throb on the lyre (9).

14 All Coventry has to offer ? (9).

15 Tin proved forethoughtful (9).

16 Hailed vociferously (9).

17 Begone, it's sad-looking (3).

18 Induces silent mirth ? (3).

22 Noughts compose this report (3-4).

24 Don Quixote's countenance (6).

25 Did "Carrots" model for him ? (6).

26 Unqualified bird-songs (6).

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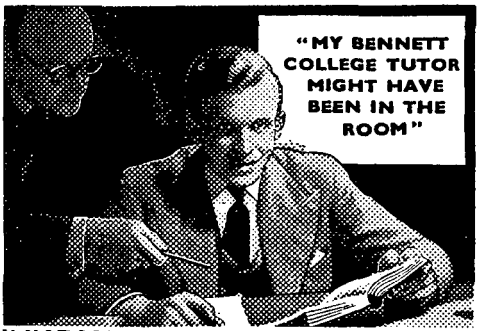

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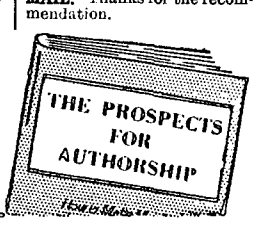

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